

## A NEW COMMODUS

A previously unpublished portrait of the emperor Commodus (AD 180–192) from one of the most accomplished marble workshops of metropolitan Rome is of considerable interest (Pls. 1–7). It comes from near the end of the emperor's rule and follows the same authorised portrait as the famous bust of Commodus in the costume of Hercules from the Esquiline in Rome (Pls. 70–72).<sup>1</sup> The portrait has a long modern history and a complicated modern 'archaeology'. This study presents the new Commodus, describes the modern life and restoration of its bust support (from a sixteenth-century polychrome bust to a new marble bust), and sets it in the context of Commodus' changing public image, from boy-prince to sole ruler of the empire. It also addresses the broader context of Roman imperial portrait history.

## The Antonines and Commodus' portraits

The Antonine emperors were the successors of Hadrian, who had put in place in AD 138 what turned out to be a remarkably successful dynastic arrangement: Hadrian adopted Antoninus Pius (ruled AD 138–161) who adopted Marcus Aurelius (ruled AD 161–180) and Lucius Verus (co-ruled with Marcus, AD 161–169). Marcus was eventually succeeded by Commodus, his natural son. Both before and after Commodus, these four 'Antonine' emperors were held in great popular affection (*SHA Vita Severi* 19.3)

Commodus was eighteen when his father Marcus died campaigning on the Danube frontier in AD 180, and thirty-one when he was murdered on 31 December 192, because, among other things, he was planning to appear in the arena on New Year's Day as a gladiator. Since he was assassinated, Commodus' reign was by definition unsuccessful, and much moralising abuse and accusations of tyrannical depravity were as ever heaped upon his head in the historiographical tradition. His memory was officially

condemned by the Roman senate, and his portrait was removed from state monuments in Rome, such as the Capitoline triumph relief that once included the young Commodus in a chariot with his father Marcus (Pl. 87).<sup>2</sup> Help however was soon at hand. We have such large numbers of surviving Commodus portraits — some ninety examples, from across the empire in various contexts — because he was swiftly re-instated as a 'good' Antonine by his successor Septimius Severus who, after a bloody civil war in AD 193–194, needed legitimacy. In AD 195 Septimius had himself retrospectively adopted as a son of Marcus Aurelius (*Divi Marci Pii Filius*) and so became a legitimate continuing member of the Antonine dynasty (he also changed his son's name to Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, nicknamed and better known to us as Caracalla). Septimius thus became Commodus' brother and had his murdered predecessor officially consecrated (deified) as a new Roman state god, *Divus Commodus*. From at least 196, Septimius was regularly styled in inscriptions *Divi Commodi Frater*, 'brother of the divine Commodus'.<sup>3</sup>

Some aspects of wider interest in Commodus' portraits may be briefly mentioned. Firstly, there is a sharp contrast between the highly pejorative literary accounts of his character and the wholly positive expression of his portraits, powerfully exemplified in the new bust. Instead of a crazed, arena-obsessed tyrant, the portraits express contemporary Antonine virtues of civilian elegance and personal sophistication. Such a contrast between their textual representations and their surviving portraits is familiar from the cases of other unsuccessful emperors, such as Caligula, Nero, and Domitian.

Secondly, Commodus was one of only a handful of Roman emperors who received 'official' portraits already as a boy. He grew up in power from boyhood to manhood and had a fast-changing sequence of newly issued portraits that to some extent represented his real, changing appear-

1 Esquiline bust: FZ I, 85–90, no. 78, pls. 91–4; here 79, pls. 70–72.

2 Capitoline triumph relief: Rome, Museo Capitolino, inv. 808: La Rocca 1986, 39–40, pls. 31–36.

3 Earliest mention on inscriptions: *CIL* VIII, 9317 (AD 195). *CIL* XIV, 113 and 3450 (AD 196). According to the (unreliable) *SHA Vita Severi* 11.3–4 and 12.8, this consecration was formally accepted by the senate only in AD 197.



Fig. 1. Head of Commodus (here 78), formerly mounted on post-antique polychrome bust wearing *lorica squamata*. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.

ance. For while it may be tempting to see Roman imperial portraits as power symbols whose relation to reality was unimportant, the very practice of creating, updating, and changing carefully specified physiognomically precise portrait types was rooted in the idea that an emperor's image should, at least in principle, look like him, that he should be recognisable from his images. A full comparable sequence of changing and updated portrait types that registered substantial changes of age, from boy to young man, is best seen in the portraits of Nero, Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus, and Caracalla.

And thirdly, among so many 'adoptive' emperors, it was unusual that Commodus was the natural son of his predecessor Marcus Aurelius. Indeed, he was the only Roman emperor 'born in the purple'. And it is striking how closely his portraits and their sequence were designed to follow those of his father Marcus, in aspects of their appearance, style, and step-changes. The two series, of Marcus and Commodus portraits, present a sophisticated dynastic imbrication of their main types over fifty years, from AD 138, when Marcus was adopted by Antoninus Pius, to 192, the year Commodus was murdered. Something similar was attempted between the portraits of Septimius Severus and his natural sons Caracalla and Geta — that is, before December 211 when Caracalla had Geta murdered and became sole ruler. Caracalla personally caused the Antonine

imperial image to swerve away from its second-century trajectory in spectacular fashion.

### The new portrait and its post-antique polychrome bust

The head of Commodus set on an alien polychrome bust appeared in 1902 at Christie's in London, and from the available provenance information in the catalogue of that sale and from the character of the coloured marble bust on which it was restored, it can be concluded that the head was most likely found in the middle or later sixteenth century, and had been for some time before 1902 in the Palazzo Borghese in Rome. The details are related in Appendix A to this chapter.

The dimensions of the coloured bust with the head are as follows:

Total height (including foot of bust): 87.5 cm.

Width: 70 cm.

Maximum depth: 30 cm.

The dimensions of the ancient marble head are as follows:

Height, chin to crown: 32 cm.

Width: 24 cm.

Depth, front to back: 27 cm.

When bought in 2015, the bust was made up of three main components (Fig. 1): (1) the ancient head in white, fine-grained Luna marble, (2) the modern lower part of the neck in white marble, and (3) the modern polychrome bust. The head had clearly been broken off through the middle of its neck in antiquity, and the break was then later cut to a smooth undulating line for attachment to the modern lower neck which was mounted on the bust. The underside of the ancient part of the neck was also hollowed out in a broad, neat mortise into which a short thick tenon, carved with the new lower neck-piece, was fitted. The head and new neck part were joined with rosin (a natural adhesive made from condensed pine resin) and a single long iron dowel that was set into the head at one end and into the bust at the other.

In 2015 the head remained in good condition, but with strong dirt accretions on the surface that had accumulated over centuries. Its only other old restoration was its nose (doweled and glued), a sensitive rendering of precisely the correct form of Commodus' nose. The only other damage to the head was in the hair. The ends of some twenty of the tightly curled locks had been broken off, some in antiquity and some perhaps in the modern era. There is also some light surface damage to the brows and proper right cheek.

## Polychrome bust

The coloured-marble bust is made up of several pieces in at least six different kinds of stone:<sup>4</sup>

- (a) the paludamentum on the proper left shoulder in a plain grey marble — a *bigio morato*, or more precisely a *bigio lumchellato*, probably from Vitina in the Peloponnese (or conceivably, though less likely, from Göktepe in Asia Minor);
- (b) the scale cuirass and arm lappets in a yellow marble — a pale *giallo antico* or *giallo di Siena*;
- (c) the *epomis* or shoulder strap inlaid in a speckled black marble — *breccia quintilina*, probably from Liguria;<sup>5</sup>
- (d) the small gorgoneion in red marble — most likely *rosso antico*;
- (e) the corrugated edge of the tunic emerging from under the cuirass at the neck in alabaster — probably *ghiaccione del Circeo*, a calcite alabaster;<sup>6</sup>
- (f) the moulded foot of the bust in a speckled light grey marble — probably *breccia medicea* from the quarries of Stazzema in Tuscany, used occasionally in antiquity as a substitute for Skyros breccia, but much more in the Renaissance when the quarries were owned by the Medici family.<sup>7</sup>

In its evidently long modern life, the sensitively pieced polychrome bust has sustained considerable damage: the black inlay of the *epomis* was badly fragmented (parts from its lower end are broken off), and a stone representing the round fibula of the paludamentum is missing from its socket. The inside of the socket was roughly worked to help the adhesive used to attach the fibula.

Large numbers of coloured marble busts made in the early modern period for ancient or newly carved portraits of Roman emperors survive.<sup>8</sup> This bust stands apart from most of them, together with a small group of other busts, in two principal respects. Firstly, it follows an ancient cuirass form quite closely, and secondly, it uses an unusually large number of varied marbles — six different kinds of coloured stone instead of the more usual one or two. Other



**Fig. 2.** Hadrian, ancient head on polychrome bust of later 16th century wearing *lorica squamata*. Rome, Palazzo Colonna.

modern polychrome busts tend to be very free in the interpretation of appropriate ancient-style drapery and in the mannered style of the gorgoneion. The scaled form of the cuirass (*lorica squamata*) is unusual in such busts, both ancient and modern, and shows an interest in researched ancient detail. It stands closest to a small group of polychrome busts with *lorica squamata*, some of which are associated with the workshop of the Tommaso della Porta, father and son, working in the second half of the sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup> This group consists of busts of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius in the Palazzo Colonna in Rome (Figs. 2 and 3), a bust of Titus in the Palazzo Farnese in Rome (Fig. 4), and a bust of a youth (whereabouts unknown) recorded in a drawing from the Montalto Codex (Fig. 5).<sup>10</sup> The new polychrome bust was most likely made then in the second half of the sixteenth century.

4 Warm thanks to Lorenzo Lazzarini and Ben Russell for help in identifying these stones.

5 On this unusual marble, see Bruno 2002, 279–80.

6 On this material, see Bruno 1998, 213–20; Bruno 2002, 286; Bruno 2004, 64–6.

7 On this marble, see Price 2007, 131.

8 Good examples in Dresden: see Martin 2013, 1–26, with colour plates, and now Kansteiner and Kojas 2023.

9 For a good account of this workshop's activities and the extensive della Porta collection of ancient marble sculptures (which later became part of the Borghese collection): Ioele 2016, 87–104.

10 Busts of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, Palazzo Colonna: Piccozzi 2010, 118–25, nos. 14–15, figs. 14–15 (E. Fileri). Bust of Titus, Palazzo Farnese, Rome: Fittschen 2006, 239–40, under no. 14, n. 6d, pl. 70.4, 'attributed to Tommaso della Porta (c. 1520–1567)'. Montalto Codex (early seventeenth century): Seidel 2016, 106, fol. 39, with fig. on p. 298.

**Fig. 3.** Antoninus Pius, ancient head on polychrome bust of later 16th century wearing *lorica squamata*. Rome, Palazzo Colonna.



**Fig. 4.** Titus, marble bust of later 16th century wearing *lorica squamata*. Rome, Palazzo Farnese.



**Fig. 5.** Bust of youth, wearing *lorica squamata*, drawing from the Montalto Codex, early 17th century.



## The portrait head

*Technique.* The hair and beard of the ancient portrait head were worked deeply with varied drill bits into complicated curled arrangements. The locks articulated with drills were then lightly carved with chisels in long 'strands' that follow the direction of the curls. The hair was drilled in equal detail on the front, sides, and back of the head. Only the hair on the crown and top of the head was worked without the drill. The hair of the eyebrows was engraved with light short strokes that follow the arching line of the eyebrows. The eyes have a standard, lightly engraved iris line and a drilled pupil with a vertical hanging stem that in the polychromy of such portraits would have carried the white highlight of the eyes' 'wet' surface. The heavy upper lids were set off from the brow and eye-socket with a sharp 'black' line worked with a drill and then cleaned with chisels. All traces of tooling were removed from the smooth skin surface, which was no doubt once polished. It is now a smooth matte surface.

*Description.* The strong effect of the portrait comes from its striking handling of a core idea or feature shared by many Antonine portraits: the combination of calm restraint in the facial features with a highly 'movemented' styling of its hair and beard. The emotionless reserve is shared by most

imperial portraits until Caracalla. The dynamic style of hair and beard was something new in Antonine portraiture and life.

Like the best metropolitan versions of the authorised portrait on which it was based, the new head has an imposing crown of stylishly curled hair that is both wide and tall and sits high on the head above a tall expanse of smooth, motionless forehead. The tall face retains only a little of the distinctive broadness in the lower cheeks that was a hallmark of Commodus' early sole-ruler portraits (seen, for example, in the Getty bust [32, Pls. 37–38] and in the Vatican head [34, Pl. 41]). The thin nose preserves the start of the modulated aquiline curve seen on coins and in fully preserved versions of this portrait type (for example, the Esquiline bust, 79, Pls. 70–72). The engraved pupils and iris lines of the eyes are turned slightly to the subject's proper right, in the direction, as always, that the head would have turned on its bust.

The eyes have a highly distinctive, late-Antonine family formulation, with very large bulging upper eyelids that sit under arched eyebrows. The surface taken up by the exposed eyes is less than that of these idiosyncratic upper eyelids. They were clearly a real family trait, derived from Commodus' father and represented prominently in Marcus' later portraits. The emphatic treatment of this physiognomical peculiarity was part of the representation of Commodus as the natural son of Marcus Aurelius. Also derived directly from Marcus' later portraits and appearance in later life are the long strands of beard that grow over the jawline to 'touch down' on the sides of the neck. In side view, the unusual shape of the head, consistent across other versions of Commodus' late portraits, is also visible — that is, it is shallow front to back, with the back and top of the head seeming to lack the volume demanded by nature.<sup>11</sup> The large, superbly worked ears are tucked in under the hair.

*Hair and beard.* Although difficult to understand (or believe), the thick curling hairstyle was generated from a traditional Hellenistic-style starfish pattern on top of the head. The locks of the 'starfish' are animated but lie in flat, overlaid locks. They are perhaps a representation of the plainer hair that in life was curled with a hot iron into the tight mass of styled hair we see on the front and sides.

At the front, the hair is brushed up in three large and memorable 'signature locks' at the centre of the brow, and further dynamic locks curl onto and up from the brow to either side. Behind this 'fringe', the hair is drilled out deeply into thick 'energetic' curls. The preferred view of the head, when turned on its bust, was slightly from its proper left side, and here long locks are trained backwards, giving the otherwise wholly placid features of the portrait a sense of dynamic forward motion. Although the hair is apparently casual and seems as if it could have been invented by the executing sculptor as he proceeded, it was in fact following a tightly scripted design that we see with a different technique on the Esquiline bust (79, Pls. 70–72).

The long beard also followed a careful design. It grows skilfully out of the cheeks and chin into a forked arrangement on its axis, with two long central locks twisted in opposite directions, but with a lot of variety to preserve a natural appearance. Beneath the lower lip, there is a light tuft or patch of soft hair in delicate low relief. This tuft was both part of the authorised model and a subtle dynastic motif. It occurs on some private portraits but in the imperial sequence probably referred to the similar tufts of beard hair on the portraits of the three revered pillars of the dynasty, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, and Lucius Verus.<sup>12</sup>

The new portrait is, with the Esquiline bust, the very best, most detailed, and most sensitively worked of the fourteen or so surviving versions of the authorised portrait from late in Commodus' reign. It is both of high quality and very well preserved. The scale, detail, all-round finish, and technical refinement of the new portrait show clearly that it was originally part of a bust, not from a statue. The head is of bust scale and of bust quality. We will come later to its place among the full range of Commodus' portraits, and here address the missing bust, its two modern restorations, and the portrait's conservation history.

## The new marble bust

The ancient head does not sit well on the polychrome bust; it is simply too large for it, something seen most clearly in profile. During the recent conservation of the portrait, it was decided to remove the modern polychrome bust and

11 See, for example, the portraits in the Vatican (80, Pl. 73) and Dresden (88, Pl. 80).

12 Some examples. Antoninus Pius: FZ I, 63–6, no. 59, pls. 67–9. Marcus Aurelius: FZ I, 74–6, no. 68, pls. 78, 80, 82. Lucius Verus: FZ I, 79–81, no. 73, pls. 84–6. On private portraits: FZ II, 111–2, no. 109, pls. 136–7 and 113, no. 111, pls. 137, 139 (both early Antonine).

replace it with a new bust that fits the head better. The head is now mounted on a modern marble bust wearing plain armour, based on a fully preserved Antonine bust, that of Marcus Aurelius from the Palazzo Braschi in Rome.<sup>13</sup> This bust was selected for three reasons: it is of the right scale; it is cuirassed, as most probably was the original bust; and it is unusually plain and does not ‘compete’ with the ancient portrait. Appendix B to this chapter provides a fuller account of the recent conservation history of the new portrait and its restoration in 2016–19. A precise physical documentation of the head on the polychrome bust was made by mounting a cast of the head on it, to provide a record of the *status quo ante* — that is, before the new restoration with the plainer marble bust. This cast with the ‘original’ polychrome bust is now part of the collection of the Ashmolean Museum’s Cast Gallery (H 125).

The most important result of this restoration is that the head ‘sits down’ on its new bust in the manner of complete ancient busts and turns, as it should, slightly to its right. The posture of a head on its bust was a vitally important part of Roman portrait art: the head should sit and turn naturally on its shoulders.

## Appendix A: Provenance

The new portrait on its polychrome bust was bought by its present owner in 2015 (private sale). It is documented at Christie’s on 17 June 1902 in London, in a mixed sale with a long-titled catalogue.<sup>14</sup> On pp. 13–14, under a heading ‘The Property of a Gentleman’, there are two further sub-sections, firstly ‘Old French Decorative Furniture’ with six items (Lots 69–74), then ‘Objects of Art’ with five items (Lots 75–79), among which are two portraits of Roman emperors (Lots 78–79). Lot 79 is ‘A life-size bronze bust of a Roman Emperor. *From the Borghese Palace.*’ This bust has not been traced.

Lot 78 is the Commodus, misidentified or nicknamed as Lucius Verus (‘Lucio Verro’). The full entry reads as follows:

‘A bust of Lucio Verro, life-size: the head is an antique and was found in 1565, in the Villa Minerbetti, near Lucca, and set in a polychrome torso like all the Vatican busts of Roman Emperors. *It stood on the stairs of the Borghese Palace in Rome.*’

Although the published catalogue of 1902 includes no image, we can be near-certain that this is the same bust as the one sold in 2015. Hand-written marginal notes in the Christie’s copy of the sale catalogue record in abbreviated form (in one hand) that a Mr Sinclair attended the sale for this item and (in another hand) that it was bought for Lord Carysfort. This Lord Carysfort should be William Proby, the fifth Earl of Carysfort KP.<sup>15</sup> The bust stayed in the possession of his family until its sale in 2015.

There are no documents recording the whereabouts or movements of the bust before the 1902 sale. Much of the basic information given in the Christie’s entry, however, is likely, at least in broad outline, to be correct. The entry records that the bust was last in the Palazzo Borghese in Rome. This is not to be confused with the Villa or Galleria Borghese but the still privately owned Palazzo Borghese off the Via Ripetta near the Tiber, south of the Mausoleum of Augustus. The palazzo was and is run as a commercial operation, and that it should seek to raise capital by a sale of

13 Palazzo Braschi, Salone, inv. 234: FZ I, 74–6, no. 68, pls. 78, 80, 82.

14 The title page reads as follows: *Catalogue of Porcelain, Decorative Furniture & Old French Tapestry, the property of James Graham Stewart, Esq., Removed from 19 Carlton House Terrace; A few pieces of Old French, English Furniture sold by order of the Executors of Sir Henry Bedingfeld, Bart. Deceased, late of Oxburgh Hall, Stoke Ferry and choice specimens of Old Sevres, Dresden,*

*Worcester, Chelsea & Old Chinese Enamelled Porcelain; Decorative Objects and Old English & French furniture from various Private Sources: which will be sold by Auction by Messrs. Christie, Manson & Woods, at their Great Rooms, 8 King Street, St. James’s Square, On Tuesday, June 17, 1902, at one o’clock precisely.*

15 Venn 1953, 206, s. v. PROBY, The Hon. WILLIAM.

this kind, through the discreet intermediary of 'the Property of a Gentleman', is credible.<sup>16</sup> In the same year, 1902, the famous collection of paintings that had been in the Palazzo Borghese for more than two centuries was sold by the Borghese family to the Italian state and transferred to the Villa Borghese.<sup>17</sup>

Given the likely date on independent grounds of the polychrome bust in the later part of the sixteenth century, the recorded information that 'the head ... was found in 1565' is also credible. That it was found 'in the Villa Minerbetti, near Lucca' is however surely incorrect. There is such a villa in the La Pietra district north of Florence, constructed by the Minerbetti family in the fourteenth century, later owned by the Ruspoli family and renamed Villa Ruspoli, but Lucca is some seventy kilometres from Florence, and there seems to be no trace of a Villa Minerbetti there. This detail is perhaps less likely an easily disproved fabrication than a research error of 1902. The Villa Minerbetti / Ruspoli in Florence, after various changes of hands, was re-acquired in 1868 by a member of the Ruspoli family, the Duchess of Lucca. Such a collocation of names and places might have led to the mistake, but this aspect of the provenance information can hardly be relied upon.

What we can safely conclude about the bust's provenance is that it was previously in the Palazzo Borghese in Rome and was discovered in the sixteenth century. Since imperial portraits of metropolitan manufacture of such outstanding quality usually come from Rome and villas around Rome, the provenance from Tuscany has, in the absence of documentation, to remain in doubt.

## Appendix B: Conservation and restoration

The following account of the conservation history of the new portrait is a necessary record of interventions carried out, but it may also be of some interest from the point of view of ancient portrait practices.

When bought in 2015, the hair, beard, and face of the portrait were coated in thick layers of dirt and grime, especially in the deep interstices of the hair. It had 'accumulated a patina of atmospheric dark staining from oil lamps, coal fires and other pollutants over many years' and was cleaned primarily with poultices of sepiolite, then washed with warm water.<sup>18</sup> The bust was brought to the conservation studio of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in September 2016 for further conservation and restoration.

The coloured bust is a perhaps acceptable mounting for the head when seen in front view, but the side views reveal difficulties. The head is too large for the bust and it cranes forward on its restored lower neck in an awkward manner. Three options presented themselves: (1) to leave the head on the polychrome bust, (2) to remove the head and mount it on its own, and (3) to make a new and better bust on which to mount the head. The first option, leaving the head on the coloured bust, would satisfy the historical logic of the object's modern biography, but it would privilege the aspect of sixteenth-century Italian polychrome sculpture and restoration over the proper effect of an ancient masterpiece of Antonine portraiture. The defective posture of the head on the bust could perhaps be partly rectified, but it would require major interventive surgery in the restored neck that would change the 'historic' aspect of the earlier restoration. The second option, mounting the head on its own as a disembodied fragment, cut off through the upper neck, while perhaps satisfying modern archaeological purism, would deprive the portrait of a setting and much of its effect.

The third option, to make a new bust for the ancient head, has the most advantages, with the important condition that a high-quality cast also be made of the head and mounted on the restored neck and polychrome bust in order to make a proper record of the *status quo ante* and to provide a complete and precise record of the bust in its sixteenth-century form. Both paths were pursued, to carve a new and more suitable marble bust and mount the ancient

16 On the Palazzo Borghese: Hibbard 1962. Some archives listing ancient sculptures in its collection are published in De Lachenal 1982. Our bust cannot be identified in these lists, but nor can it be excluded that it lies among the large number of 'ancient heads with chests' listed there without further specifica-

tion. There are a considerable number of such busts listed — among them, c. 250 items from the Dalla Porta collection: De Lachenal 1982, 92–4, nos. 150–399.

17 On this transfer: Barberini 1984.

18 Initial report by conservator Martin Foster.

head on it, and to make a cast of the head and restore it on the coloured bust.

The head was removed from the coloured bust, and the restored lower neck-part was removed from the head. This allowed full understanding of how the first restoration had been carried out. The original neck break of the head had been trimmed to make a smooth, slightly undulating join-surface, and a broad mortise had been cut into its underside. A tenon had been carved with the new lower part of the neck, and fitted into the mortise and glued with rosin. A long iron dowel had run through the assemblage of all three parts — that is, bust, neck, and head.

The detached head was scanned to make a complete, high-resolution 3D model, from which a 1:1 version was printed in nylon (that is, sintered plastic or, more technically, SLS Duraform PA). Such nylon replicas have good ‘registration’ but also an unappealing translucent gloss. A silicon mould was therefore made of the nylon head from which three traditional plaster casts were produced. One plaster cast was mounted on the lower marble neck, using the same mortise and tenon join, and this assemblage was mounted on the coloured bust in the same posture as that of the original sixteenth-century restoration. This version of the original polychrome bust with the plaster cast of the head was generously donated to the Ashmolean’s Cast Gallery (acquisition number H 125). The other two casts were used in the process of making the new bust.

As a model for a new marble bust for the ancient head, the bust of Marcus Aurelius (in his last or fourth type) from the Palazzo Braschi in Rome, now in the Capitoline Museum, was selected.<sup>19</sup> This bust fulfilled three important criteria: (1) it is of the right scale; (2) it is cuirassed — the most likely costume to have been worn by the original bust; and (3) it is unusually plain, without scales, decoration, or a gorgoneion — that is, a newly carved version of it would not compete for visual attention with the ancient portrait.

First, a high-density polystyrene copy (of an alarming orange colour) of the complete Braschi bust, made from a scan of an old workshop cast in Italy, was acquired to check the scale of the bust and its suitability beside the original portrait. A second polystyrene copy of the Braschi bust was acquired, this time without the head, onto which the sculptor Tim Lees modelled a thin layer (1–2 mm thick) of surface wax, to remove the misleading effect of the or-

ange-coloured polystyrene and to attach to it a round foot and tabula designed after the foot of the fully preserved bust of Hadrian in the Capitoline Museum.<sup>20</sup> This ‘waxed model bust’ was then used to trial mount the second plaster cast of the ancient portrait head. When the correct ‘ancient’ position of the head on the bust in all views had been found, it was fixed and recorded, and served as the agreed model for the carving of the new bust.

A block of white statuary marble was acquired from Carrara, large enough to carve from the neck to the foot in one piece. The sculptor Tim Lees carved the new bust in his workshop, including the lower neck and tenon up to the point where the ancient neck, cut with a mortise in the sixteenth-century restoration, would join it. He was able to make trial fittings as he proceeded, using the third plaster cast of the head with its faithful record of the undulating join line and interior mortise cut into the neck. The finished headless bust was then brought to the Ashmolean Museum conservation studio where the final fitting and trimming-in of the bust with the ancient head were carried out. The dimensions of the new restored bust with the head are as follows. Height: 93 cm. Width: 71 cm. Depth: 38 cm.

The sixteenth-century restored nose is both well carved and correctly formed. It was left in position. Fifteen of the missing tips of hair were restored with new, hand-carved marble pieces. Finally, the bright white effect of the new marble bust was toned down and hand-coloured to match the head. The new tips of hair were also coloured in, as well as the sharp lines around the restored nose and the join in the middle of the neck.

Two important results of the second restoration are that the head now ‘sits down’ on the new bust in the manner of a bust of the second century AD, and it now turns, as it should, to its right, in the direction indicated by the turn of its eyes. Such natural posture was an essential aspect of Roman busts, and the restoration allows us see the new portrait in a more correct and effective setting.

After its completion, the newly restored bust was exhibited in one of the bays of the Ashmolean Museum’s Randolph Sculpture Gallery, together with two other portraits on loan to the museum: a bust of Germanicus, formerly in the Elgin Collection in Scotland, and an inscribed bust of Antinous from Syria.<sup>21</sup> While there are no close parallels

19 Palazzo Braschi, Salone, inv. 234: FZ I, 74–6, no. 68, pls. 78, 80, 82.

20 Museo del Palazzo dei Conservatori, Scala 1.4, inv. 817: FZ I, 44–6, no. 46, pls. 49–51; Evers 1994, 163, no. 104, figs. 36, 38.

21 The Antinous and Germanicus busts were shown in a separate, earlier exhibition at the Ashmolean in 2018–19: Smith et al. 2018, 70–5, no. 1, with figs. (Antinous); 92–3, no. 8, with fig. (Germanicus). The Germanicus bust was later acquired, in 2021, by the J. Paul Getty Museum at Malibu: Potts 2022, no. 5.



or precise ‘ancient’ lessons to be drawn from the process of modern restoration, the planning, trial viewings, sourcing of models, their transport in light materials, and their closely copied execution in marble gives some idea of what

was required in the production of ancient busts — with the chief difference that where this modern process took months, ancient Roman workshops would probably have taken weeks.<sup>22</sup>

22 The sourcing and carving of the new marble bust required six months, while the whole process extended from 2016 to 2019. First discussions and planning, January 2016. Further discussion with conservators and restorers in front of bust, September 2016. Scanning and 3D-printing of nylon copy of head, finished in July 2017. Marble block sourced from Carrara, December 2017. New marble bust carved and fitted, by November 2018. Plaster cast of ancient head fitted to polychrome bust, September 2019. Exhibition of restored marble bust in Randolph Gallery of Ashmolean Museum, opened 6 December 2019.

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coordinator. Martin Foster, private conservator, made a preliminary report on the condition of the bust and carried out an initial cleaning. Tim Lees, marble sculptor, carved the new marble bust, fitted the head to it, and restored the missing tips of hair. Joanna Skwiercz, Cliveden Conservation, carried out the colouring-in of the new marble bust. Annemarie La Pensée, Consultant for 3D Laser Scanning of Cultural Heritage and Related Applications, made the scan and 3D nylon print of the portrait head. Tom Flemons, Cliveden Conservation, made the silicon mould and plaster casts from the 3D-printed nylon model. Steve Mellor, Cliveden Conservation, carried out the initial removing of the ancient head from the polychrome bust, as well as the later repair and restoration of the polychrome bust with a new plaster cast of the ancient head. Paul Roberts, Keeper of Antiquities, Ashmolean Museum, kindly collaborated in the exhibition of the newly restored bust in the Ashmolean’s Randolph Sculpture Gallery.

