May 2014

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HIC EST UXOR MIHEI:
How Roman Funerary Portraits Carve the Ideal Freedwoman

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Submitted as an Honors Project to the Macalester College Classics Department

April 2, 2014

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the depiction of Roman freedwomen (former slaves) in thirty-five late Republican and Augustan funerary portraits. Extant portraits utilize a complex visual and written vocabulary to reveal a wide variety of views of freedwomen’s status and agency. This paper relies upon analyses of the cultural climates of the late Republican and Augustan period, careful interrogation of the material evidence through the lens of both post-structuralist and affective theory, and the use of case studies. Ultimately, it argues that funerary portraits create diverse representations of the ideal freedwoman that become part of an ongoing cultural dialogue concerning the place of freedwomen in Roman society.
I would like to thank my defense committee, particularly my advisor Beth Severy-Hoven, for their invaluable comments and feedback on this thesis. In addition, thank you to the 2012-2013 staff of the Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies, Rome, particularly Joel Ward, for their help in generating the idea for this paper and for their comments on an early short paper that paved the way for this year-long project.

I am indebted to the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom, particularly Daria Lanzuolo, and to the Trustees of the British Museum for their assistance in locating images and securing permissions.

Finally, thank you to the family and friends who have read parts of this paper, who have offered invaluable feedback, or simply put up with me through what is probably an unhealthy fascination with dead freedwomen.
Introduction

Imagine a city: crowded streets with stone facades on all sides, advertisements jostling for public notice, passers-by stopping to take in the sights, and, inevitably, trash on the ground and graffiti on the walls. Just one thing to add: all the inhabitants (or, at least, all the intended inhabitants) are dead. Roman writers call this city the “streets of tombs,”1 the major roads outside city walls that were lined with tombs competing for prominence and the attention of those passing by. The funerary sphere was highly competitive, and generations of Romans built large and elaborate tombs designed to give themselves an edge over their rivals. For a brief period in the late Republican and Augustan periods, Rome’s streets of tombs featured a distinctive monument style with portraits of the deceased in relief mounted onto the wall. These funerary portraits, typically associated with freed slaves, used both visual cues (the portrait) and written (accompanying inscriptions) to keep the memory of the deceased alive.

A number of scholars have examined these portraits, beginning with Diana E. Kleiner, to whose work *Roman Group Portraiture: The Funerary Reliefs of the Late Republic and Early Empire*2 I am deeply indebted. Most of these studies have looked for similarities across the entire corpus of portraits and have tended to minimize differences between portraits. As a result, several key variables including gender, wealth, country of

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1 Michael Koortbojian, “In Commemorationem Mortuorum: Text and Image Along the
origin, and others have been unexamined or minimally examined. I am concerned with the first of these: namely, what techniques do the portraits use to depict women, and what meanings did these techniques convey in the context of late Republican and Augustan Rome? To examine these questions, I will begin with an overview of freedpeople’s portraits, the major debates surrounding their study, and the methodology I will use throughout this study. The next section will examine the cultural climate freedwomen experienced in the late Republican and Augustan periods. Then, I will explore the visual and written techniques the portraits use to craft idealized representations of freedwomen in dialogue with the changing image of freedwomen in the late Republican and Augustan periods. The last section will cover the ways in which visual techniques and cultural contexts combine in specific portraits to produce very different conceptions of Roman freedwomen’s identities and agency.

In the late Republican and Augustan periods, Roman freedwomen encountered multiple, competing expectations of ‘appropriate’ behavior. There is no such thing as ‘the’ freedwoman portrait. Instead, the genre reveals an ongoing cultural dialogue concerning the identity, status, and agency of Roman freedwomen. Within this cultural dialogue, freedwomen and their commemorators used funerary portraits to argue for their interpretation of the ideal freedwoman. The portraits reflect choices made in a period of shifts and upheavals. In these portraits, we find not uniformity but rather diversity, a series of choices that forge the image of the Roman freedwoman. Although they draw from a shared visual vocabulary, the portraits use these techniques to different ends and produce different visions of the ideal Roman freedwoman. Each portrait not only commemorates an individual life, but it also tells what values the freedwoman or her
commemorators viewed as important and communicates what vision of the Roman freedwoman she, her heirs, and her family wanted to present to posterity.
THE FUNERARY PORTRAIT GENRE

The funerary portrait genre first appeared in Rome around 75 BCE. Typically, the genre features frontal busts of the deceased carved into stone ‘windows,’ as in the portrait of Lucius Vibius and Vecilia Hilara (Fig. 1) but a number of variations including busts in tondos (circular shields) or full-length portraits are also extant today. While most male funerary portraits use the highly realistic style characteristic of late Republican statuary, women’s portraits tend toward eternally youthful and stylized depictions, becoming more realistic only in the Augustan period.

The style of facial carving, hair, and drapery guide the dating of these portraits, although scholars dispute the correct dates of many of these elements. Kleinercatalogues ninety-two portraits in Roman Group Portraiture and assigns dates between 75 BCE and 5 CE. Of these ninety-two portraits, thirty-five definitely include freedwomen, and these will form the primary corpus of evidence in this study. Kleiner’s study end with reliefs dated to 5 CE, but portraits continued to be produced throughout the Roman world, assuming local variations such as a multi-tiered monument from Ravenna and later

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3 Kleiner, Roman Group Portraiture, 180.
5 Kleiner, Roman Group Portraiture, 93-4, 105.
6 Koortbojian, “In Commemorationem Mortuorum,” 222.
appearing as insets on funerary altars. This study will be limited to the early portrait type, examining its depictions of freedwomen within the context of the late Republican and Augustan periods.

Before examining the freedwomen’s portraits, it is critical to acknowledge that the association of this genre with freedpeople is disputed. Most scholars assume that freedpeople were the only users of this genre, arguing—in Eve D’Ambra’s words—funerary portraits are “evidence of the agency of a new class of patrons, freedmen and freedwomen, whose portraits document their relative affluence and, perhaps, even inflated their social presence.” This assumption, however, both ignores the material evidence (or lack thereof) and uses what Lauren Hackworth Petersen dubs “Trimalchio vision.”

For the first problem, the material evidence: of the ninety-two extant portraits, only forty-seven have complete—or, at least, legible—accompanying inscriptions. Of these, thirty-nine list at least one freedperson. Another five do not label the deceased as either f(ilius/a), freeborn son/daughter, or l(ibertus/a)/l(ertus/a), a freedman/woman, but include a cognomen commonly associated with slaves, suggesting freed status.

7 Kleiner’s subsequent work, Roman Imperial Funerary Altars with Portraits (Rome: G. Breitschneider, 1987), examines this later portrait genre.
10 The cognomen is the third part of a male Roman name—for example, Cicero in Marcus Tullius Cicero—or second part of a female name—for example, Drusilla in Livia Drusilla. The cognomen does not appear in early Roman names, but was in common use for both men and women by the late Republic. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
This tally still leaves three portraits with no proof of freed connections. Assuming that the same proportions were true for the portraits now missing their inscriptions, it appears that freedpeople were the predominant, but not exclusive, users of the portrait genre. Thus, while many Romans may have associated this genre with freedpeople, it is important not to over-generalize and say the portraits represent the values of all freedpeople or just freedpeople. In this study, I will refer primarily to portraits that seem highly likely to depict freedwomen, but I will use scholarship that assumes an exclusively freed genre, albeit with caution.

In addition to ignoring the material evidence, the second problem that emerges from assuming this genre’s connections to freedpeople is that of “Trimalchio vision.” Named for the character Trimalchio in Petronius’ Satyricon, this term refers to a scholarly tendency to perpetuate “ancient elite, pejorative attitudes about ex-slaves, rather than getting closer to revealing the multifaceted and diverse intentions of historical ex-slaves.” Elite Romans depicted freedpeople as ambitious social climbers who did everything to excess, and modern scholarship frequently adopts the same tone. For example, when Michele George refers to the tomb of the probable freedman Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces as anticipating “the expanded and more idiosyncratic repertoire of funerary imagery that emerged in the libertine monuments of the first century AD,” she

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12 Hackworth Petersen, The Freedman in Roman Art and Art History, 10.
falls victim to Trimalchio vision by associating freed status with idiosyncrasies, deviations from the (elite) norm.

In this paper, I will attempt to avoid Trimalchio vision by considering freedpeople’s portraits within a wide range of attention-grabbing strategies employed by all who could afford funerary monuments in this period. Indeed, the description of Trimalchio’s own monument, the most “idiosyncratic” of all, resembles nothing so much as Augustus’ funerary monument due to its enormous size, list of accomplishments, and use of a sundial.14 If Trimalchio is a parody of elite Roman society as well as of freedpeople, it is impossible to use this character to make claims solely about the lives of freedpeople. Instead, while the figure of Trimalchio still provides insight into elite pejorative views of freedpeople, his figure also mocks a broader cultural emphasis on funerary competition. In order to avoid the problem of Trimalchio vision, this study will view these thirty-five freedwomen’s portraits within the context of a multitude of funerary choices along the “street of tombs” all competing, in their different ways, for recognition.

A METHODOLOGY FOR INTERPRETING THE PORTRAITS

In place of the traditional approach to the portraits that relies upon elite-authored literature and falls prey to Trimalchio vision, I will rely primarily upon the portraits themselves and will argue that the differences between one portrait and another offer keys to their meanings. In order to perceive these differences, I will view the portraits as both textual and affective pieces.

14 Hackworth Petersen, *The Freedman in Roman Art and Art History*, 86.
The portraits are textual insofar as they are objects to be read and interpreted. Clearly, they often include written text (the inscription), but they also contain the visual text of the figures depicted in the portrait as well as the figures’ spacing, background embellishment, and more. I believe that we can identify “myths”\textsuperscript{15} of the portraits, or culturally resonant ideas and values that the portraits reference through textual elements associated with those ideas and values. By viewing the portraits as text, I will explore what myths the portraits attempt to convey, assessing the ways in which one portrait’s symbolism complements or contradicts another’s. This textual method, rooted in post-structuralist theory, is fairly common for interpreting the portraits; however, it does not capture the entirety of their meanings. A post-structuralist approach assumes that reactions to the portraits are uniform and conditioned solely by their culture’s dominant social scripts. While it is critical to consider the portraits within a framework of these scripts, the portraits also exist within a framework of individual human interactions.

Within this second framework, people have the potential to resist dominant myths and create alternate interpretations based upon individual experiences and emotions. The relatively new field of affect studies seeks to examine this alternate interpretive framework. Affect studies, to Sara Ahmed, begins with “the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and what I have called ‘the drama of contingency,’ how we are touched by what comes near.”\textsuperscript{16} This is a very different starting point than that of traditional post-structuralism. Instead of beginning with the abstract


realm of language, affect studies begins with the physical realm of the relationships
between bodies. From there, it explores the ways in which human physical and emotional
reactions to one another, to myths, and to the objects that convey those myths produce
meaning.

According to affect studies, individual responses matter. Affect studies is often
seen as a “way out” of traditional post-structuralism, an opportunity to re-insert and re-
value human subjectivity and our ability to resist cultural norms. According to this
view, the commemorators of portraits do not passively reiterate dominant social scripts,
but instead craft portraits that reflect their individualized views of the deceased and of
their cultural contexts. The portraits present affect in two ways: by explicitly referencing
the emotional lives of freedwomen and their commemorators and by gesturing to the
ways in which these emotions and reactions both respond to and create cultural myths.
One short example demonstrates how affect plays out in the portraits. Love between
husbands and wives was a cultural expectation of the late Republican and Augustan
periods, and some portraits use a marital handclasp (Fig. 8) to signify this love. On one
level, this gesture is affective in that it demonstrates a human emotion. On another level,
the use of this affective gesture reinforces the social script of loving marriages by
demonstrating the validity of that script within an individual context. In this example, the
affective elements use individual experience to strengthen an extant cultural myth, but we
shall also see examples of ways in which the affective elements of portraits assert

June 2013, doi: 10.1080/09502380500365473.
18 Suzanne Dixon, “The Sentimental Ideal of the Roman Family,” in Marriage, Divorce,
and Children in Ancient Rome, ed. Beryl Rawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
individual experiences that resist cultural expectations by depicting socially improper emotions.

The two methods of interpreting portraits—as textual and as affective objects—explore these portraits as the products of both cultural environments and individual experiences. As a result, both methods are necessary to fully interpret the portraits. Not all scholars agree that both text and affect are represented in the portraits, however. Michael Koortbojian notes that when affective gestures appear in the portraits, they require “contortion and elongation or foreshortening of limbs.” 19 Due to this awkward contortion, Koortbojian argues that the portraits are “inhospitable to the introduction of explicitly affective or emotive qualities. This may be deduced from the awkwardness which results when attempts to represent such qualities intrude on the basic formula.” 20 In many instances, Koortbojian’s hypothesis may be supported; the portraits focus on textual elements to the exclusion of affective ones, perhaps in keeping with the constraints of the traditional portrait formula. In others, however, affective qualities are key to reading the portraits’ meanings. Whether ‘awkward’ or not, they supply new information that colors the audience’s view of the deceased. As I explore the freedwomen’s portraits, I will turn to both textual and affective interpretations in order to more fully comprehend the range of meanings these portraits may have had for their ancient audiences.

19 Koortbojian, *In Commemorum Mortuorum*,” 225.
20 Koortbojian, *In Commemorum Mortuorum*,” 225.
Commemorating the dead clearly mattered to Romans. Tombs lined the streets leading into Rome and used size, novel decoration, or unique features such as benches to compete for the attention of passers-by. \(^{21}\) Not all of Roman society, however, participated in building these elaborate displays. Instead, Rome’s tombs reflect the priorities of those wealthy enough to afford the variety of expenses that went along with building a tomb. To Eve D’Ambra, building a tomb was an “extraordinary act of the deceased individual who accumulated enough capital to afford a tomb, who assigned an heir to perform the rites at the tomb, as well as to maintain the practice and perpetuate memory.” \(^{22}\) Within this comment lie three important functions of the tomb: the display of wealth and status, the relationship to survivors, and the preservation of memory.

The first of these functions, the display of wealth and status, is primarily textual. A large tomb built from expensive materials shows that the deceased or their commemorators were wealthy. A list of the deceased’s accomplishments—holding the consulate, military posts, citizen-status, et al.—shows social standing. For the freedpeople who used the portrait genre as part of their tombs, their depictions in these portraits are signs of their status as well. Michele George argues that the expression of status for freedpeople was restricted to “the safe confines of a genre based on the most traditional Roman ideals and presented in a highly formalized arrangement” and argues that this reveals “a degree of caution that influenced their initial commemorative

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\(^{22}\) D’Ambra, “Acquiring an Ancestor,” 223.
choices.” On the surface, George is correct; the portraits refer to a number of traditional elite values in order to make claims concerning the status of the deceased. Throughout this study, I will explore the ways in which these claims play out. Within this “formalized arrangement,” however, we will also see claims to status that reject some traditional ideals. Thus, in order to find displays of status within the portrait genre, it will be necessary to read into the portraits and interpret the wide variety of status-myths they convey.

As for the second function, the relationship to survivors, here the tomb takes on an affective role as well as a textual role. The family of the deceased, particularly the designated heir or heirs, interacted with the tomb regularly. They visited the graves; left offerings; and possibly held rituals such as feasts, ceremonial circling of the tomb, or reading the name of the deceased aloud. One of the goals of these visits may have relied upon the textual myths of the portraits. Interactions with the tomb may have connected the status and wealth of the deceased to his or her commemorators, extending this textual reading to the next generation as well. There is, however, an affective side to this practice as well. Because these mourning rituals are based in emotions, the tomb creates an affective link between the deceased and their commemorators. As the family or heirs returned to the tomb regularly, the tomb would have begun to stand in for the relationship the deceased and the family held in life. Particularly in the case of the funerary portrait genre, the family may have begun to recall the image of the deceased on the tomb in

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23 George, “Family Imagery and Family Values in Roman Italy,” 54.
place of their living face, and this may have encouraged visitors to transfer their relationship with the deceased to a relationship with the tomb. Simply standing near the tomb could inspire visitors to feelings of love—or disdain—for the deceased, sorrow at their passing, or any of the other myriad human emotions. The ritual actions would help the family internalize these emotions, creating an affective cycle that replaced the relationship between deceased and commemorators with a relationship between tomb and commemorators. As an affective object, the tomb signified the former emotional relationship.

Finally, in the goal of preserving memory, the textual and affective aspects of the tomb come together. The goal of displaying wealth and status asked viewers to think a certain way about the deceased—to view them as important figures. The goal of forming relationships to survivors asked viewers to feel a certain way—to have a (hopefully) positive set of emotions surrounding the deceased. These two goals combined to create an analytic and emotional record of the dead. As Valerie M. Hope reminds us, however, this record “created an edited impression of the dead.”25 The textual aspects of the tomb did not faithfully record every part of the life commemorated. Instead of responding to the entire living person, the visitor over time responded to the simplified and iterable set of emotions produced by interactions with the tomb. Thus, in both its textual and affective qualities, the tomb is an idealized form. This third function of preserving memory does not aim to protect every aspect of the relationship between the dead and the living.

Instead, it aims to script a particular memory of the deceased that fits the intentions of
the tomb-builder. In the end, these three goals—displaying wealth and status, creating a
relationship with survivors, and preserving memory—combine to create an idealized
view of the deceased, and one that reflects the cultural priorities of its period as well as
the individual priorities of those who commissioned the tomb.
II. Freedwomen’s Portraits in their Cultural Contexts

Cultural context heavily influenced the form of funerary portraits. As a freedwoman’s commemorators chose how to depict her—how she should pose, what to call her in the inscription, what hairstyle she should have, or what background the portrait should show—the politics and culture of contemporary Rome influenced their choice. Undoubtedly, commemorators knew that the tomb’s audience would form different textual interpretations of the deceased depending on how she was presented, and it must have been critical for the audience to have the right impression. The choice of how to depict freedwomen was not merely aesthetic in late Republican and Augustan Rome. Instead, as freedwomen’s lives and reputations underwent sweeping changes in these periods, their commemorators used stylistic choices to enter into dialogue with these shifting perceptions. The choice of a particular method of representing a freedwoman could not only speak to her life but also affect the lives of her contemporaries. This section will outline the changing perceptions of freedwomen in the late Republican and Augustan periods—in particular, the ways in which their legal agency and inclusion within the life of the city shifted—and trace the ways in which funerary portraits respond to these transformations.
FREEDWOMEN IN THE LATE REPUBLIC

Although it is impossible to know exactly how many freedpeople lived in and around the city of Rome in the late Republic, sources suggest that manumission was a fairly common practice. The Augustan period would see the passage of laws designed to regulate manumission by limiting the ways in which former slaves could gain citizenship. Only custom, however, regulated manumission in the Republican era, and the custom seems to have been that many slaves could aspire to—and perhaps expect—manumission after several years of service.

Following manumission, freedwomen experienced a complicated web of expectations. Due to their combination of female and freed identities, freedwomen were expected to be simultaneously active and passive, public figures and private domestic individuals. As former slaves, freedwomen were expected to be independent, yet they experienced an ongoing legacy of external control. While enslaved, they had been their masters’ property. Slave owners had absolute power of life or death, vitae necisque potestas (Gaius, Iustitiae 1.52), over their slaves, and enacted this power upon the bodies of slaves. Bodies “did not enjoy any protection from violence or other kinds of

28 Although Gaius was writing in the second century CE, Cicero and others suggest that this power was firmly in place during the late Republican and Augustan periods. Raymond Westbrook, “Vitae Necisque Potestas,” Historia 48.2 (1999): 204, accessed 11 September 2013 from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4436540.
physical abuse, which might also include sexual exploitation."²⁹ Once freed, these former slaves’ situations became more complicated. In some ways, freedpeople gained control over their lives and over their bodies. Those freed by citizens became citizens in turn, they could legally marry, and their children had access to the *cursus honorum*, the series of public offices that marked the traditional route to power in the Republic.³⁰ Thus, on the one hand, freedpeople gained at least nominal agency through manumission.

On the other hand, freedpeople’s relationship to their former masters, now considered their patrons, often mirrored the slave-owner dynamic and retained an expectation of submission. Freedpeople were expected to fulfill *operae et obsequium*, duties that could range from political to economic support,³¹ and frequently owed their patrons a share of their estates.³² Patrons’ power over freedpeople could extend to sexual acts as well: Seneca Maior quotes Haterius as saying, “in pudicitia in ingenuo crimen est, in servo necessitas, in liberto officium,” (*Exerpta Controversiae* IV.prologue.10), “Sexual availability is a crime for the freeborn, a necessity for a slave, a duty for a freedperson.” Freedpeople’s continued lack of control over their bodies led to stigmatization. From the elite perspective, freedwomen in particular were “believed to be promiscuous and morally depraved” and “represented the precise opposite of the pristine *matrona* [household mistress] on the moral spectrum.”³³ This stigmatization was in itself another form of control over freedwomen. It implied that Roman society needed to

³¹ George, “Family Imagery and Family Values in Roman Italy,” 39.
³³ George, “Family Imagery and Family Values in Roman Italy,” 50.
control the body of the freedwoman due to her lack of self-regulation. Thus, because of their freed status, freedwomen had to navigate the relationship between at least nominal agency and their continued legal and moral lack of control over their bodies.

As women, too, freedwomen encountered this dilemma. Legally, a Roman woman was under lifelong guardianship, *tutela*. Her father had legal authority over her during childhood, her husband during marriage (or, if she married *sine manu*, her father retained control), and an appointed guardian gained authority if both father and husband had died. Thus, although they were not considered subhuman property in the way that slaves were, women were still legally controlled by the men in their lives. In fact, Roman sources frequently compare women and slaves in order to explore their mutual dependence upon and subordination to free men. For example, Roman *exempla*, stories intended to promote moral behavior, script both women and slaves as “intimate strangers” within the male-dominated house. Unlike slaves, however, free women were seen as capable of honor and modesty. These traits elevated them over slaves, but also further restricted them to the domestic setting in order to preserve these virtues. All free Roman women, regardless of class, seem to have experienced at least an expectation of domesticity and male dominance. To Kristina Milnor, “it is…striking how consistently

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35 Ormand, *Controlling Desires*, 141.
the same virtues recur, in texts which range from funerary epitaphs for freedwomen to descriptions of women in the imperial house.\textsuperscript{39}

The expectation of women’s domesticity and lack of agency may disguise the independence many Roman women experienced in their day-to-day lives. Many elite women in the late Republican period seem to have been socially and politically influential as well as financially independent.\textsuperscript{40} Cicero refers to elite women throughout his speeches as both examples of moral behavior and as corrupting influences, suggesting that these women lived public enough lives that a broad audience would recognize their names, deeds, and personalities.\textsuperscript{41} Farther down the social ladder, it becomes harder to track the extent of women’s independence. Wall paintings, epitaphs, and other evidence suggest that non-elite women led public lives and worked in a wide variety of occupations.\textsuperscript{42} The ideal of male control may have been far removed from women’s lived realities.

Like all other women, freedwomen must have encountered this tension between the expectation of male control and the reality of their independence. Since they also had to negotiate freedpeople’s balance between legal freedom and continued obligations to their patrons, however, freedwomen were put in a particularly delicate position. Joshel and Murnaghan argue that female slaves embodied Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s concept of the

\textsuperscript{40} Dixon, \textit{Reading Roman Women}, 169.
\textsuperscript{41} For example, Cicero’s condemnation of Clodia in \textit{Pro Caelio} reveals her notorious public presence and influence.
“double exclusion” from public life.\(^{43}\) If so, freedwomen embodied the double uncertainty. As women, the Roman ideal considered them controlled by men. As freedpeople, they relied upon legal independence to distinguish themselves from slaves. As women, the ability to have honor was a consolation prize for their lack of agency. As freedpeople, the continued stigma of their lack of control over their bodies denied them this honor. There was no single ideal for freedwomen to follow, no one understanding of their expected role in society.

PORTRAYING REPUBLICAN FREEDWOMEN

It is difficult to be sure of the dating of many of the freedwomen’s portraits. Most dating relies upon a problematic trickle-down method, which assumes that the emergence of a particular hairstyle, et al. in elite portraiture determines a *terminus post quem* for that style in freedpeople’s portraits. The problems with this assumption will be discussed in more detail in the next section, but it is important to mention them here in order to emphasize that many of the portraits that sources consider late Republican may actually be Augustan, and vice versa. That said, I rely upon Diana Kleiner’s dating system unless there are reasons to doubt her dating of a specific portrait. Altogether, there are seven to nine late Republican freedwomen’s portraits extant, seven from Kleiner and two more that Kleiner considers Augustan, but the Museo Nazionale and Musei Capitolini consider Republican.

These early portraits establish a trend that will continue throughout the period of the funerary portraits. In the face of freedwomen’s double uncertainty, they emphasize

visual and written language of legitimate families in order to focus on freedwomen’s honor rather than their stigmatization. The portrait of Clodia Stacte, Numerius Clodius, and Gaius Anna Quinctio (Fig. 2) shows a freedwoman and freedman, who likely share a patron, and, to their left, a freeborn man. Although it is unclear in this case what the actual relationships between the three may have been, the portrait presents them as a tightly-knit group in order to elevate the two freedpeople to the status of the freeborn man. Since many other portraits, such as that of the Occii (Fig. 3) use this group imagery to denote fully legitimate citizen-families, the portrait of the Clodii and Gaius Anna Quinctio makes the three akin to a family unit, further emphasizing their close connections.

The inscription on the portrait of the Clodii and Gaius Anna repeats the focus on the bonds between the three figures and specifically frames these bonds within the rights of Roman citizens. It reads:

Clodiae N(umerii) l(iberta) Stacte N(umerius) Clodius N(umerii) l(ibertus) C(aii) Annae C(aii) f(ilius)
L(ucius) Marcius L(ucii) f(ilius) Pal(antina) (tribu) Armitrupho Pal(antinu) (tribu)
M(arcus) Annius M(arci) l(ibertus) Hilarus Quinctionis
Hoc m[onumentum he[rdes]

Of Clodia Stacte, freedwoman of Numerius; Numerius Clodius, freedman of Numerius; Of Gaius Anna, son of Gaius Lucius Marcus Armitrupho, son of Lucius, from the Palantine tribe Marcus Annius Hilarus, freedman of Marcus Quinctio

Their heirs [made] this monument

The term *heredes*, heirs, emphasizes the trio’s close ties and legal standing. It demonstrates that, whatever their relationships may have been, they were close enough to have a joint estate granted to the same heirs. Additionally, the fact that they could have a legal estate marks their citizenship. These two meanings behind the word *heredes* emphasize freedpeople’s capacity for agency and elevate their standing to that of the
freeborn with whom Clodia Stacte and Numerius Clodius are linked. There is no sense of hierarchy here; Gaius Anna Quinctio does not have higher standing than the two freedpeople, and the two men are not superior to Clodia Stacte. Instead, the portrait depicts all three as equal citizens.

The depiction of both freed and freeborn citizens makes this portrait a particularly vivid example of the ways in which late Republican portraits emphasize their families’ citizenship in order to choose agency over dependency. Many portraits from this period reflect similar choices, listing the deceased’s accomplishments in an echo of elite epitaphs’ list of titles44 or specifically attributing the power to build the monument to the deceased.45 Together, these portraits reveal that, from its earliest usage onwards, the portrait genre was an arena for building freedpeople’s identities in dialogue with contemporary society.

FREEDWOMEN AND THEIR MARRIAGES IN THE AUGUSTAN PERIOD

In the Augustan period, expectations of freedwomen’s agency or lack thereof became even more complicated due to a series of moral reform laws. In 18 BCE and 9 CE respectively, Augustus and the year’s consuls enacted two new laws: the Lex Iulia and the Lex Papia Poppaea, commonly known as the Augustan marriage laws. These two laws are our best evidence for the diverse views of freedwomen present in the Augustan period. Through their association between freedwomen and infames as well as their attempts to increase freedwomen’s subordination to patrons, the marriage laws wrote elite

44 Such as the portrait of Quintus Aelius and Licinia Athena (Fig. 6).
45 Such as the portrait of Lucius Occius, Lucius Occius Aristo, and Occia Agathea (Fig. 3).
stereotypes of freedwomen into law. The laws’ exception clauses, however, gave freedwomen an avenue to increase their legal agency, as long as they in part still fulfilled a domestic ideal. Altogether, the laws’ contradictory attitudes toward freedwomen suggest a range of views that freedwomen and their commemorators could chose to espouse, combat, or ignore altogether.

In some sections, the Augustan marriage laws limited freedwomen’s legal rights and codified a pejorative view of their worth. According to the *Epitome Ulpiani*, a late second or early third century CE list of laws,

Lege lulia prohibentur uxoribus ducere senatores quidem liberique eorum libertinas, et quae ipsae quorumve pater materve artem ludicaram fecerit, item corpore quae estum facientem. Ceteri autem ingenui prohibentur ducere lenam, et a lenave lenave manumissam, et in adulterio deprehensam, et iudicio publico damnatam, et quae artem ludicaram fecerit. (*Epitome Ulpiani* XIII.1-2)

By the *Lex Iulia* senators and their children are forbidden to marry freedwomen, and anyone who has practiced the art of the stage, either they themselves or their father or mother, likewise [senators and their children are forbidden to marry] anyone who earns a living through her body. All other freeborn men, moreover, are forbidden to marry a prostitute, and anyone freed by a pimp or a prostitute, and anyone caught in adultery, and anyone condemned by public court, and anyone who has practiced the art of the stage.

This law undermines freedwomen’s access to honor. It lumps freedwomen together with *infames*, Roman women who were commonly seen as shameful—prostitutes, actors, and adulterers.\(^4^6\) The body of the freedwoman becomes a site of shame and corruption. In particular, these laws draw a line between the behavior appropriate for the senatorial elite and for all other Romans. Freedwomen, it seems, were appropriate wives for some, but not for the upper echelons of Roman society. For men who had married freedwomen, this law implied that that they, too, were not up to the standards of the elite. Thus, in this

section of the marriage laws, freedwomen’s bodies became sites of shame, and the pejorative view of their lack of honor made its way into law. Understandably, this view of freedwomen was not popularly espoused in portraits, and we will not see instances where commemorators depict the ‘shameful’ freedwoman. We will, however, see portraits that combat this myth or ignore it altogether.

Another view that emerges from the Augustan laws is that of the freedwoman who is increasingly reliant upon and dominated by men. The *Lex Aelia Sentia* and *Lex Iulia* limited freedwomen’s legal rights, thereby increasing male control over their bodies, choices, and lives. The laws did so by restricting the rights of a freedwoman married to her patron. The phenomenon of male patrons freeing female slaves in order to marry them was not new to the Augustan period, but the *Lex Aelia Sentia* actively promoted these marriages by exempting owners who wished to marry their slaves from the law’s new manumission restrictions. In turn, the *Lex Iulia* promoted patron-freedwoman marriages through limiting the number that could end in divorce.

It is slightly unclear how the law went about this. Henrik Mouritsen believes that the *Lex Iulia* “stipulated that the freedwoman had no right to refuse marriage to her patron or to divorce him.” Marc Kleijwegt argues for a more nuanced law: freedwomen could divorce—and could do so even without their patrons’ consent—but they “were not allowed conubium [legal marriage] with a new partner, and they were unable to bring an action for the recovery of their dowry.” Even while preserving the legal right to divorce,

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49 Mark Kleijwegt, “Deciphering Freedwomen in the Roman Empire,” in *Free at Last!*:
this version of the law could have in practice dissuaded freedwomen from divorce. In either reading, the effect is clear: the *Lex Iulia* limited the independence of freedwomen married to their patrons. Since these freedwomen would be doubly under their patron-husbands’ thumbs, both as wives who were subject to their *tutela* and as former slaves who owed them *operae et obsequium*, the law here allows for the strengthened regulation of freedwomen. In this light, the Augustan prohibition of divorce may have been a response to freedwomen’s double uncertainty in the Republican period. If they could not leave their husbands, there was no need to worry that their freed status would remove them from male control.

The effects of the marriage laws were not unilaterally terrible for freedwomen, however. If a freedwoman fulfilled the expectations set in the previously discussed sections of the laws and played a domestic and male-dominated role, she could—almost paradoxically—gain the legal right to personal and financial independence from her patron. The *Epitome Ulpiani* continues its explanation of the marriage laws:

> In bonis libertinum nulla iniuriam antique iure patiebantur patroni: cum enim hae in patronorum legitima tutela essent, non aliter scilicet testamentum facere poterant quam patrono auctore. Itaque si ei auctor ad testamentum faciendum factus erat, [...] factus erat, sequebatur hereditas; si vero auctor ei factus non erat, et intestata liberta moriebatur, [...] ad posset patronum a bonis libertae repellere. Sed postea lex Papia, cum quattuor liberorum iure libertinas tutela patronorum liberaret, et eo modo concederet eis etiam sine tutoris auctoritate ut pro numero liberorum habuerit, virilis pars patrono debeatur, eique ex bonis eius, quae hereditas ad patronum pertinet. (*Epitome Ulpiani* III.44-45)

Under the old law patrons endured no injury when it came to the estates of their freedpeople: since freedwomen were under the legal guardianship of their patrons, it is clear that they had not been able to make a will without their patron’s ratification. And so if he had been her ratifier in the making of the will, [“either he

had himself to blame if he had not therein been named heir, or, if he had been so named”), his inheritance would follow; if he had not been her ratifier, and if the freedwoman died without making a will, [“the inheritance belongs to him as patron, a woman having no natural heirs, so that”] it would be impossible to block a patron from the estate of his freedwoman. But afterwards the Lex Papia, since it would release freedwomen from the guardianship of their patrons on the basis of bearing four children and in this way would allow them [a will] even without the ratification of a guardian, provided that, based upon the number of children she had, a healthy part of her estate were for him, and to any heir of the patron who outlived him.

From the perspective of the presumably elite author of this text, the Augustan laws limited the access of patrons to the estates of their freedwomen. From the freedwomen’s perspective, the Lex Papia Poppaea increased women’s ability to express their freed status and control their finances. As freedwomen contributed to the state through childbirth and played into the Roman expectation of women as wives and mothers, they could gain a set of legal freedoms from male control. Following the domestic ideal and forcing their bodies to live the ideal allowed women to paradoxically move outside that ideal.

This option of fitting the domestic ideal in order to break it matches a broader trend occurring in the lives of Roman women—particularly imperial women—in the Augustan period. Although many elite women and freedwomen alike previously had been tacitly independent and public figures, now women’s visible public presences became officially sanctioned for the first time. In particular, female members of the imperial family gained new prominence. They began to be depicted in monumental architecture and statuary, served as patrons in their own right, and took on “real and important roles in the civic sphere, without compromising their perceived performance of ‘traditional’

50 Content for the lacunae in the manuscript is suggested by James Muirhead, trans. and ed. The Institutes of Gaius and Rules of Ulpian (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1880).
domestic virtues.”⁵¹ Even as they acted without censure in the public sphere, imperial women continued to be perceived according to the domestic ideal. In this light, freedwomen’s increased control over their lives through fulfilling a domestic ideal appears to run parallel to this elite trend. It seems that many classes of Augustan women made an art of balancing public and private, independence and the domestic ideal.

There was no one clear-cut effect of the Augustan marriage laws upon the status and agency of freedwomen. Instead, the laws simultaneously codified freedwomen’s lesser status and yet acknowledged their increasing wealth and power over their estates, increased women’s regulation and yet gave them a new avenue for legal independence. Also, it is important to note that these changes did not occur overnight. Instead, the Augustan period should be understood as a time in which the status of freedwomen was the subject of a long-lasting public dialogue. The laws reflect a broad sense of uncertainty concerning just what to do with the high rate of manumission and the changing role of women, and what should happen when these two processes combined in the body of the freedwoman.

PORTRAITS IN THE AUGUSTAN DIALOGUE

Funerary portraits from the Augustan period are part of a broad public discourse around the changing expectations of freedwomen. Through their depictions of freedwomen, many of the portraits reflect these contemporary debates and attempt to craft an image of the freedwoman that avoids the newly codified pejorative view, responds to the expectation of male control, or emphasizes her legal independence.

Some of the portraits appear to be in dialogue with the *Lex Iulia*’s connection between freedwomen and *infames*. They avoid this law’s view of freedwomen as shameful or as inappropriate wives for high-status men by displaying freed wives as assets to their husbands’ status. Perhaps in order to further tie these women into the domestic ideal, these portraits depict freedwomen not just as wives, but specifically as subordinate wives. The portrait of Lucius Ampudius Philomusus and two women (Fig. 4) presents an example of the ways in which Augustan portraits may emphasize male control over women. It should be noted here that, since the women’s names are not included in the inscription, we cannot be sure that they were freed. That said, since Lucius Ampudius Philomusus is listed as freed, I believe we can still view this as a freedpeople’s portrait overall.

The women’s subordination to Lucius Ampudius Philomusus is present both in the inscription and, partially, in the portrait. Visually, he is depicted with broad shoulders while the woman to right is crammed against him and the edge of the portrait. Although the woman to the left is not as sidelined, Lucius Ampudius Philomusus’ shoulder still subtly covers hers. The inscription reemphasizes the women’s subordination. The text lists Lucius Ampudius Philomusus’ name three times, both below the portrait and on either side, but the women’s names are never mentioned. Through these omissions, the inscription focuses the audience’s attention on the male while denying the women access to public memory. Although the women exist in the portrait, their names no longer exist. Since, as has already been discussed, reading the name of the deceased out loud may have been an important part of Roman mourning practices, eliminating the women’s names eliminates their chance to be fully commemorated.
Both visually and textually, the emphasis here is clearly on Lucius Ampudius Philomusus. In a period when women were at least nominally restricted to the domestic sphere, perhaps eliminating these women’s names had the same effect, limiting their public visibility and demonstrating that Lucius Ampudius Philomusus alone fully belonged within the public eye. Simultaneously, however, including their images may act as another status indicator for Lucius Ampudius Philomusus, given the Augustan period’s active promotion of marriage and family life. The choice to omit the names of the women may have avoided the pejorative view of the women as shameful by simply dwelling on them as little as possible. Although their portraits are depicted (while sidelined), the omission of their names takes them out of the public realm and places them within a private, domestic ideal. It suggests that Lucius Ampudius Philomusus is the dominant figure, and therefore that the women are read in relation to and controlled by a man.

Other Augustan portraits respond very differently to the contemporary discussion about the role of freedwomen. One in particular seems to be invested in resisting the relationship expected between a freedwoman and her patron-husband. Rather than following the direction of the Augustan legislation and showing the patron-husband’s dominance, this portrait makes his freed wife the focus. The portrait of Gratidia Chrite and Marcus Gratidius Libanus (Fig. 5) most likely depicts a patron who freed his wife in order to marry her. Since she is listed as M(arci) l(iberta), “freedwoman of Marcus,”

while his name lacks any indication of filiation or libertine status, the inscription suggests that she may have been his freedwoman.

If so, this couple fits the category of patron-freedwoman marriages to which the Augustan legislation pays particular attention. Visually, however, this inscription breaks from the Augustan limitation of women’s power in this circumstance. Although it is difficult to tell from this photograph, Gratidia Chrite is depicted as slightly taller than her husband as he hunches. Additionally, the usual placement of male on left, female on right is reversed so that her name is the first the viewer reads. The couple’s gestures, too, suggest a reversal of the typical gender associations. While most freedmen in these portraits stretch their hands across their chests or leave them at their sides, Marcus Gratidius Libanus clasps his toga close to his shoulder, a more typically feminine gesture. Overall, Gratidia Chrite is presented as the more commanding and more masculinized of the two. This is a reversal of the Augustan expectation, and it suggests that—for some reason a modern audience will never know—Gratidia Chrite and Marcus Gratidius Libanus were invested in insuring that no one read them according to the legal expectations of Augustan patron-freedwoman relationships. Instead, the portrait resists the social script by celebrating Gratidia Chrite’s power within her marriage and eliminating all hints of her dependency.

Finally, other Augustan portraits appear to emphasize the loophole in the Augustan legislation that allows women who fulfilled a domestic ideal and gave birth to four children to gain legal independence. Some do so by depicting children on the
portrait, a feature that Kleiner considers an Augustan innovation.53 The portrait of Marcus Epictes, Lucius Numenius, Truphera, Melissa, and Europa includes the figure of a young child.54 In addition to the clear affective reading of sorrow at the passage of a young child, the depiction of children may have had another effect as well. For the freedwomen, it may have pointed to their fertility, and therefore to their independence and ability to contribute to Roman society through childbirth.

Another portrait demonstrates a freedwoman’s independence through the inscription rather than the depiction of the figures.55 The inscription reads: “Cn(aeo) Pompeio Cn(aei) l(ibertus) Prothesilavo/ Numonia L(ucii) l(iberta) Megisthe sibi et viro suo” (Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum VI, 24500), “Numonia Megisthe, daughter of Lucius, for herself and her husband, Cnaeus Pompeius Prothesilavus, freedman of Cnaeus.” It is slightly unclear in this case whether Numonia Megisthe built this tomb following the death of her husband while she herself was still alive, or whether her will provided for a tomb for both of them. In either circumstance, however, it is a clear testament to her financial resources and independence. Although Numonia Megisthe would have been able to build this tomb under the tutela system as well, the portrait’s emphasis on her agency must have made this tomb a part of the contemporary public dialogue on freedwomen’s right to personal, legal, and financial self-control. In cases such as these, freedwomen’s funerary portraits demonstrate the Augustan reforms’ opportunity for freedwomen to increase their power and visibility in the public sphere.

53 Kleiner, Roman Group Portraiture, 188.
Freedwomen’s portraits in the Augustan period interact with the changing expectations for freedwomen’s agency visible in the marriage laws. There is no one identity articulated in the portraits. Instead, portraits respond in a variety of ways to the various effects the laws had upon freedwomen’s lives and reputations. While some emphasize male control on the wake of the Augustan marriage laws, others embrace the potential for freedwomen to demonstrate their independence as a result of these laws. The status of freedwomen seems to have been hotly contested in Rome during this period, and so it should come as no surprise that the portraits envision multiple forms of freedwomen’s identity reflecting what must have been the different needs of those who commissioned the portraits.

CONCLUSION: PUTTING THE PORTRAITS IN CONTEXT

Without putting the portraits into the cultural contexts of the late Republican and Augustan periods, it is impossible to understand the full weight of the choice of adding a few key words to the inscription such as the sibi et viro suo of Numonia Megisthe’s inscription or of adopting a particular style such as a tightly-knit group that denotes familial legitimacy, as in the case of the Clodii and Gaius Anna Quinctio. The language of the freedwomen’s portraits gained meaning through these cultural contexts. Both Republican and Augustan portraits responded to the shifting expectations surrounding freedwomen, establishing an art form focused on the family in the face of Republican freedwomen’s double uncertainty and becoming part of a broad dialogue over freedwomen’s agency in the wake of the Augustan marriage laws. For the portraits as for every other part of the Classical world, context is everything. The next section will dive
more deeply into the vocabulary of the portraits, exploring the visual and written
techniques used to tell stories about the deceased. Throughout this section, it will be
critical to remember the contexts of the late Republican and Augustan periods. The
choices the portraits make through their physical techniques do not exist in isolation, but
rather form a dialogue with the expectations the people of Rome had for freedwomen in
the particular moment each portrait was commissioned.
III. Visualizing the Ideal Freedwoman

Freedwomen’s funerary portraits rely upon a relatively restrictive and formulaic visual and written vocabulary. They utilize simple inscriptions as well as portrait reliefs with a relatively small range of poses. What appears on first glance to be a limited variety of expressions, however, interacts with a rich legacy of artistic traditions to forge a Roman identity for the deceased. By combining elements of this narrow vocabulary in new and novel ways, the portraits develop idealized views of freedwomen that promote Roman identities distinct from yet in dialogue with their contemporaries. This section will demonstrate the ways in which portraits craft an idealized view of freedwomen and will provide a glossary of the techniques used in making this ideal.

THE IDEALIZED FREEDWOMAN

The erection of a funerary portrait marks the displacement of the lived body of the freedwoman by an idealized body. The three functions of a tomb discussed in section I—displaying wealth and status, creating a relationship with survivors, and preserving memory—combine to create an idealized view of the deceased, and the portrait physically demonstrates this transition, hiding the dead body and simultaneously displaying a new stone body to replace the living. This displacement of the real body creates a new set of meanings for the portrait-body of the freedwoman. In life, the body is “open materiality,” “a set of (possibly infinite) tendencies and potentialities which may
be developed yet whose development will necessarily hinder or induce other developments and other trajectories." As bodies move through the world, they act, they feel, they grow and change. The living body is never one thing and can never be encapsulated entirely by one description. This is the opposite of the idealized portrait-body. The portrait idealizes the physical body of the deceased and replaces “open materiality” with a restricted range of meanings chosen to affirm a particular view of the deceased.

The facial similarities of many of the freedwomen’s depictions hint at this restricted range of meanings. The portraits tend to feature almond-shaped eyes, oval faces, and serene expressions. Until the Augustan period, when some portraits begin to depict older women, the freedwomen also have unlined faces. Since it is unlikely that these women were as identical in life as they seem in their portrait, the portrait appears to depict an idealized view of the women that superimposes particular values—perhaps a contemporary view of female beauty, perhaps an emphasis on youth and vitality—onto their depictions. Whoever decided to depict the women this way chose from a range of possible meanings and picked the ones seen here. The commemorators could have chosen to depict wisdom gained through age (a common interpretation in male portraits) or even physical corruption matching moral decay—although this choice would hardly be flattering. Out of a wide range of possibilities, they chose a youthful portrayal and thereby eternalized this decision at the expense of the other possible interpretations. The

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portraits make a choice, pick a particular ideal, and the rest of ways that someone could have interpreted the body are suppressed.

THE VOCABULARY OF THE PORTRAITS

The portrait-bodies utilize a range of visual and written techniques in order to depict a chosen ideal. When commemorators choose a particular hairstyle, they may reference an Augustan cultural context and its accompanying views of freedwomen. When they arrange women’s hands in a certain way or name her in a certain way, they align themselves with another idealized view of freedwomen. In order to understand the views of Roman identity explored in the freedwomen’s portraits, it is critical to begin with the full range of visual and textual options chosen by commemorators when they commissioned the portraits. To do so, we will look at the variety of visual and written techniques used to express three main themes: the cultural affiliations of the freedwomen, the portraits’ interplay with elite imagery, and the importance of the citizen family.

A Greek Image?

It is impossible to be sure how funerary portraits first came into use. Since no literary sources write about these portraits, we do not have a sense why Roman contemporaries thought this genre existed. In the absence of help from these sources, scholars have turned to the stylistic features of the portraits in order to guess which cultures and trends influenced the development of the genre. Based on these features, the consensus seems to be that funerary portraits draw from both Greek and Roman art in order to craft a form reminiscent of both, but ultimately distinct from either.
One hypothesis that has gained a great deal of traction is that funerary portraits mimic Greek *stelai*, tombstones common to the Hellenistic world. Natalie Boymel Kampen and others advance this hypothesis, claiming that the portraits borrow the depictions of families and gestures including handclasps (which we will discuss shortly) from these portraits.\(^{58}\) Since many of the freedpeople of the late Republican and Augustan periods are likely to have been Greek or of Greek descent,\(^ {59}\) it is entirely plausible that they drew from this tradition for their funerary monuments. This does not mean, however, that these freedpeople embraced every element of the Greek tradition. Michael Koortbojian describes the ways in which funerary portraits differed from *stelai*:

The Hellenistic funerary *stelai* were free-standing stone slabs, not affixed to the wall of the tomb. Moreover, certain characteristics of the imagery often encountered amid the corpus of these Hellenistic monuments—such as the narrative interactions of the depicted figures and the exaggerated distinctions of scale between the figures represented—had little impact on the Roman reliefs. Most importantly, although some of the Hellenistic *stelai* are marked by the starkly frontalised poses of their figural forms—the aspect most similar to the Roman reliefs—the Greek tradition conceived these forms as idealised memorials of the dead rather than as the vehicles for portraiture.\(^ {60}\)

Thus, while the funerary portraits may have derived their basic form—images in relief of the deceased arranged in groups—from Greek sources, there are other elements that appear to have come from different sources. For these, we must look not to where the freedpeople may have been born, but to where they died: the city of Rome.

The non-Hellenistic characteristics of the funerary portraits—their placement on a tomb, absence of narrative and scale distinctions, and emphasis on frontal poses—draw

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\(^{59}\) George, “Family Imagery and Family Values in Roman Italy,” 38.

\(^{60}\) Koortbojian, “*In Commemorationem Mortuorum*,” 216.
from a more typically Roman vocabulary and suggest that the portraits engaged with both Greek and Roman traditions. The tomb styles that freedpeople chose, particularly the large monumental structures typical of the late Republican period, often resembled those of their freeborn contemporaries. Thus, looking beyond the portraits to their architectural context, it is clear that decidedly Roman funerary styles are present. These Roman influences carry over onto the portrait itself. Late Republican Roman male portraiture was static and highly veristic. The typical style relied upon wrinkles, protruding ears, and other harshly depicted features in order to convey venerability and a distinctly Roman identity.\(^6\) This style can be seen on many freedmen’s portraits.

Since Roman women were not depicted in public until the mid-first century BCE,\(^6\) some of the early portraits borrowed this veristic style for women as well, while others turned to Greek and other Eastern Mediterranean sources by depicting women as youthful and almond-eyed. Two early (75-50 BCE) portraits, that of Lucius Occius, Lucius Occius, and Occia Agathea (Fig. 3) and that of [Quintus] Aelius\(^6\) and Licinia Athena (Fig. 6) depict these different choices for women’s portraiture. While Occia Agathea has virtually the same face as the male deceased, Licinia Athena’s unlined oval face makes her appear younger than Quintus Aelius, although it is difficult to see Quintus Aelius’ wrinkles from this photograph. The differences between these two representative

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\(^{63}\) *Aelius* is the only part of the name extant on the inscription. Presumably, his *praenomen* would have been the same as his patron’s, which the inscription lists as *Q(uintus)*.
strategies reflect the two cultural traditions that inform the portraits. Each freedwoman or commemorator who commissioned a portrait could make a choice between these traditions, and that choice was not empty. Instead, the choice between Greek and Roman styles may refer to freedwomen’s “double uncertainty” in the late Republican period. By choosing a Roman style, freedwomen and their commemorators aligned themselves with traditional images of Roman power, inviting both the men and women depicted to gain status through this traditional imagery. A Greek style, in contrast, breaks from the traditional mold for Roman power, perhaps either because the commemorators thought this style inappropriate for women or because they sought to depict a different form of status than that gained through the Roman model. Both choices approach the question about women’s status and sphere in the late Republican world, but offer different answers.

Interacting with Rome’s Elite

The Roman artistic conventions utilized in the portraits are, more specifically, those of the city’s elite. In some cases such as the use of public architectural motifs and references to elite *imaginæ* (funerary masks or busts), this interaction appears to have been primarily one-way: freedpeople were inspired by and innovated from elite artistic traditions. In other instances, such as freedwomen’s gestures and hairstyles, it is more difficult to tell which classes started the trend. Rather than a trickle-down pattern in which freedpeople imitated elite customs, what emerges in freedwomen’s funerary portraits is a dialogue with Rome’s elite. Both freed and elite take inspiration from one another as they explore ways to represent Roman identity on stone.
The trickle-down method is a very traditional approach to interpreting and dating freedpeople’s portraits. Kleiner relies heavily on this approach, for example assuming that a portrait of a woman depicting a nodus (knot) hairstyle must have been created after elite women began using this style in the 40s BCE. This approach, however, follows in the footsteps of “Trimalchio vision” in terms of its pejorative view of freedpeople. It assumes that freedpeople could not innovate and had no impact on dominant culture. Furthermore, this approach has often been used without supporting material evidence or in spite of evidence that suggests a freed origin of a particular style. The trickle-down method is, as we shall see, an appropriate interpretation at times, but there are other cases in which the evidence contradicts or fails to support this interpretation.

In fact, one aspect of the portraits for which the trickle-down model may be inappropriate is freedwomen’s gestures. Two kinds of gestures, the pudicitia family of gestures and the dextrarum iunctio, appear on a total of twelve of the thirty-five portraits dated between 75 BCE and 5 CE. Both gestures come to signal ideal Roman modesty to both an elite and freed audience, but some evidence suggests that freedwomen were the first to be shown with these gestures.

Pudicitia gestures, or gestures indicating a married woman’s modesty and upright behavior, include women tugging veils across their chests or raising a hand to the face. The first type of pudicitia gesture, present on the second of three women named Furia in

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64 Kleiner, Roman Group Portraiture, 131.
one portrait (Fig. 7), was used heavily in the Eastern Mediterranean in the second century BCE. In that context, it seems to have signified a woman’s modesty. This gesture may, however, derive from an even earlier source: Attic grave stelai. Stelai use both types of pudicitia gestures to represent women’s mourning rituals. Freedwomen’s commemorators may have picked up this gesture from these stelai. In the Augustan period, it became more common to depict the hand-to-face pudicitia gesture than the hand-over-chest gesture, probably in part because this gesture was less complicated to carve. This later pudicitia gesture appears on the portrait of Vecilia Hilara (Fig. 1).

Elite women begin using the pudicitia gesture later than their freed counterparts. According to Antonia Holden and Jane Francis, it does not appear on statues of elite women in Rome until the mid-forties BCE, a good ten to twenty-five years after freedwomen’s portraits first utilized this gesture. Holden and Francis argue that elite women began using this gesture in imitation of “the patronage of Roman women in the eastern provinces who chose to portray themselves, their social standing, their marital status, and their wealth, in the manner of the local aristocracy” in the first half of the first

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66 The portrait’s inscription reads: “Furia ɔ(aiae) l(iberta) L(ucius) P(ublius) Furius P(ublii) l(ibertus) Furia ɔ(aiae) l(iberta) Furia ɔ(aiae) l(iberta) C(aius) Sulpicius C(aii) l(ibertus),” “Furia, freedwoman of a woman; Lucius Publius Furius, freedman of Publius; Furia, freedwoman of a woman; Furia, freedwoman of a woman; Gaius Sulpicius, freedman of Gaius.” Note: while inscriptions generally list male patrons by the abbreviated form of their praenomen, they list all female patrons with ɔ as an abbreviation for Caia, a generic female name. James Chidester Egbert, *Introduction to the Study of Latin Inscriptions* (New York: American Book Company, 1896): 421.
century BCE, but these women actually may not have had to look so far from home. Instead, they could have mimicked the tombs immediately outside their city, on which freedwomen began using this gesture in the early first century BCE as well. We cannot prove that elite women adopted the *pudicitia* gesture from freedwomen’s portraits, but it is certainly a possibility. What is clear, though, is that Roman freedwomen could not have been imitating the elite of their city. The trickle-down method is not an appropriate interpretation of the emergence of the *pudicitia* gesture.

A similar pattern may be in place in the case of the *dextrarum iunctio*, a handclasp that likely signifies a married couple (*Fig. 8*). Six portraits utilize this gesture or a slight variant of it on their portraits in order to emphasize a legal marriage—which, as we shall see, is an important theme in freedwomen’s portraits. Carola Reinsberg suggests that this gesture did not become part of elite imagery until the Antonine period. In contrast, it appears on freedwomen’s portraits as early as 30-13 BCE in the portrait of the Servilii. If this is correct, trickle-down clearly cannot be the source of this imagery, and, as in the case of the *pudicitia* gesture, we may instead be looking at a ‘trickle-up’ pattern, in which the elite began to use a gesture previously associated with freedpeople.

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70 Holden and Francis, “The Females of the Cartoceto Group,” 47.
In one other case, that of hairstyles, it is impossible to determine whether elite women’s or freedwomen’s depictions set the trend. Kleiner relies heavily upon hairstyles to date portraits, but her argument is often circular: because there is a nodus, the portrait must date to 30 BCE or later, which means that portraits do not use the nodus until 30 BCE or later. Other than drapery technique, which also relies upon an unproven use of the trickle-down method for dating, there is little to no corroborating evidence to suggest that that this hairstyle could not have come into use in freedwomen’s portraits earlier and from there made its way into elite depictions.

Just because the trickle-down method appears unsupported in some cases, however, does not mean that freedpeople never borrowed from the elite repertoire. In the case of public architectural motifs and the repurposing of the imagines, a trickle-down method seems to be an appropriate interpretation. Some portraits, including that of the 30-13 BCE portrait of [Lucius] Bennius Bassus, Bennia Musa, and Lucius Bennius Anic[74 (Fig. 9), use detailing commonly seen in elite public architecture to emphasize the status of the deceased. In this portrait, the busts of the two men sit in scalloped tondos while Bennia Musa’s tondo is decorated with acanthus leaves. Acanthus, as the dominant element of Corinthian capitals, was part of the vocabulary of public monuments. In the Augustan period, it became closely linked to the emperor himself in monuments such as

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74 [] Bennius Bassus’ praenomen is no longer extant. The inscription lists his title as “[B]ennius L(ucii) ⌟(aiae) l(ibertus) Bassus,” so his praenomen may be Lucius, derived from his male patron. The remainder of the other Lucius Bennius’ cognomen is missing and cannot be determined either.
the *Ara Pacis*, Augustus’ Altar to Peace.\(^{75}\) Since the use of acanthus in elite monuments predates Bennia Musa’s portrait, it is likely that her commemorators were drawing from elite sources when they chose to depict her with this background. This choice places Bennia Musa’s portrait in dialogue with elite architecture, implying that her tomb is as important as the new public buildings with elaborate Corinthian detailing that were transforming the face of Rome in the early Augustan period.

Finally, the portraits’ references to elite *imagines* demonstrate the ways in which the portraits appropriated and transformed symbols of elite identity. Natalie Boymel Kampen argues that the funerary portrait evokes *imagines*, elite ancestor busts or masks.\(^{76}\) Indeed, one portrait inscription (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* VI, 2170) even refers to the figures as *imagines*. Traditionally, *imagines* depicted only elite men who had held public office—impossible qualifications for freedpeople.\(^{77}\) To Kampen, the portraits’ evocation of *imagines* attempts to elevate the descendants of freedpeople to the status of freeborn elite male citizens.\(^{78}\) The descendants can claim at least one earlier generation of Roman citizenship and can prove a legacy of wealth and legitimacy.


\(^{76}\) Kampen, *Family Fictions in Roman Art*, 11.

\(^{77}\) Harriet I. Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 12. It is important to note that many of the specifics about *imagines*—including their material, whether they were made before or after death, and whether or not the portraits displayed in elite *atria* were the same as those carried in the *pompa funebris*, the funeral parade—are highly disputed. For recent thoughts on this debate, see David Noy, “‘Goodbye Livia:’ Dying in the Roman House,” in *Memory and Mourning: Studies on Roman Death*, ed. Valerie M. Hope and Janet Huskinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 1-20.

\(^{78}\) Kampen, *Family Fictions in Roman Art*, 11.
Unlike the traditional *imagines*, however, freedpeople’s funerary portraits commemorate both men and women as ancestors. Throughout the Republican era, depictions of elite women, whether typically as *imagines* within the home or in honorary statues, were highly unusual. We know of only four possible public statues of women prior to the Augustan period: of a Vestal Virgin named either Taracia Gaia or Fufetia (Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 34.25), of Cloelia (*Naturalis Historia* 34.13), of Claudia Quinta (Tacitus, *Annales* IV.46), and of Cornelia (*Naturalis Historia* 34.31). Of these, we only have evidence for the statue of Cornelia; the others, if they had ever existed, disappeared long before Pliny the Elder and Tacitus wrote. Whether there was one public statue of a woman or four in Republican Rome, this number was dwarfed by the rapid expansion of portraits of freedwomen.

A traditional portrait of an elite woman, whether an honorary statue or an *imago*, was almost unthinkable in the late Republican period, but a freedwoman’s portrait was already commonplace. The inclusion of freedwomen as ancestors demonstrates the ways in which freedpeople were borrowing from elite traditions and making them their own. Rather than simply reusing the elite custom of displaying *imagines*, freedpeople dramatically expanded the Roman idea of ancestorship, finding it expedient to include women within this custom. This is not a simple case of trickle-down practices. Instead, it is a sign that freedpeople were engaged in a larger dialogue with contemporary Roman society concerning who counted as a citizen, an ancestor, and a family in a rapidly changing city. This dialogue led both groups to borrow artistic imagery and techniques from one another and repurpose these techniques in order to make radically different claims.
Techniques Portraying the Citizen Family

For freedpeople, a key part of (re)formulating their identity through art was the depiction of the family as citizens and the emphasis upon this citizen-family’s cohesion. Scholars have pointed out the preponderance of family imagery in freedpeople portraits and have created both affective and textual interpretations of its importance. Family imagery could have affective meanings of sentiment and security. For all classes, it appeals to “the expectation of affection within marriage and the appreciation of young and youthful children” visible in Roman life beginning in the late Republic.\(^\text{79}\) For freedpeople, the family had an added affective resonance. It suggested a level of security unimaginable before manumission and relief from the fear that the family would be separated and sold.\(^\text{80}\) Undoubtedly, depicting the family on the tomb appealed to both of these affective meanings and became a point of pride.

The use of a wave-effect in freedpeople’s portraits emphasize this affective relief from the fear of separation. Michael Koortbojian notices that many portraits use drapery folds to “carry the eye across the length of the panel, joining the individual forms in a single, wave-like pattern.”\(^\text{81}\) This technique has two main effects: it moves viewers’ eyes along the length of the portrait so that they notice each individual face relatively equally, and it blends together the rest of the bodies below the neck. Through this blending of the bodies, the portrait encourages viewers to give equal weight to each figure, thereby treating the individuals as equals. One portrait (Fig. 10) uses this technique to extremes.

\(^{80}\) George, “Family Imagery and Family Values in Roman Italy,” 41.
\(^{81}\) Koortbojian, “In Commemorationem Mortuorum,” 217.
It depicts a togated male on the left with a young woman center and a middle-aged woman on the right. All three figures are virtually identical below the neck, to the extent that the artist could have even carved the bodies before receiving a commission to depict these particular individuals. The figures’ hands guide the viewer’s eyes; each right hand is placed across the chest, encouraging the eye to move from left to right in a smooth motion as if reading. The wave-effect here is clear: the bodies become little more than background while the heads capture the viewer’s eye, each in its turn. The portrait presents its members as inseparable in order to emphasize the cohesion of the family.

Beyond the affective relief from separation, the emphasis on the family in these portraits had textual meanings as well. The Servilii’s use of the dextrarum iunctio indicates that the couple was legally married—a right gained only after manumission. The depiction of freedwomen in these portraits marks their families as legitimate and adamantly separates these family members from their former positions as slaves. As with the inclusion of women as imaginæ, elements of this emphasis on the citizen family were highly innovative and declared a sense of agency that in the eyes of an elite audience may have seemed inappropriate for freedpeople, particularly freedwomen. Michele George describes this public declaration:

The formation of autonomous families with legitimate children, who were born with full Roman citizenship and to whom they could leave an inheritance, was a crucial achievement for freedmen who had few ways of attaining public distinction. Moreover, the display of this accomplishment before the public gaze in family tombs was itself a form of participation in public life and one of the few permitted to late Republican freedmen. For them, the declaration of a family identity on funerary monuments was the assertion of an agency that was denied them in other spheres of Roman life.  

82 Kammen, Family Fictions in Roman Art, 12.
83 George, “Family Imagery and Family Values in Roman Italy,” 39-40.
We can add to George’s argument that freedwomen—not just freedmen—participated in this public declaration of agency, for example by denoting their ability to create a legal will thanks to the *Lex Papia Poppaea* (see previous section). Even in the Republican period, however, women’s inclusion within this declaration of agency may have seemed shocking, particularly given that, at this time, public images of women were few and far between.

Although no ancient sources specifically describe reactions to freedwomen’s portraits, we do have some evidence that women’s statues of any variety were contentious. Cato the Elder, a second century BCE orator, condemned the provincial practice of establishing statues of women (*Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta* fr. 94). Marleen Flory believes that women’s honorary statues remained a rarity in Rome throughout the Republican period and, as a result, sentiments such as Cato the Elder’s may have continued to hold weight.\(^\text{84}\) In contrast to Cato the Elder’s wishes, then, freedwomen’s depictions in funerary portraits use a public form—a funerary portrait—to make a claim about the legitimacy of their families and contradict a common elite expectation that freedpeople would be controlled by their patrons. Although we cannot be sure how contemporary Romans reacted to this public declaration, it is clear that freedwomen and their commemorators are expanding the sphere in which women were thought appropriate to appear in order to declare their own civic status and that of their families.

Through gestures that emphasize legal families and the presence of women as ancestors, the portraits suggest that a fully legitimate family was a point of pride for freedpeople. Through family imagery, the portraits of the Furii, Vibii (Vecilia Hilara’s family), and Servilii, as well as many others, assure the next generation of their status as full Roman citizens, able to participate in public life, and with a distinguished heritage to boot. Due to the public declaration of citizen status, the descendants of those pictured in the funerary portrait could make a critical claim: they could prove their legal status, point to sufficiently wealthy ancestors, and assure themselves that they were progressing up the social ladder of Roman society. The depiction of Roman freedwomen in these portraits breaks from the Republican ideal of the entirely private and domestic woman and instead participates in a public celebration of her family’s status and promise of continued success. Moving into the Augustan period, elite women begin to follow the trend of increased representation in the public sphere, while still appearing to fulfill a domestic ideal. In 35 BCE, the first public honorary statues of Livia and Octavia appear, and from then on it becomes more common for public images of ‘domestic’ women to convey messages about their families’ values. Through the Augustan period, freedwomen’s funerary portraits continue to appear, becoming part of a public landscape in which women made public claims that they and their families were legitimate and morally worthy in the eyes of Rome.

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CONCLUSION: THE ART OF DEPICTING FREEDWOMEN

Through adapting Greek and Roman artistic styles, using visual techniques in dialogue with elite art, and emphasizing the citizen family, freedwomen’s funerary portraits claimed their family’s legitimacy within the city of Rome. Freedwomen and their commemorators engaged in dialogue about their evolving status in the late Republican and Augustan periods, creating funerary art that made tacit claims about their double uncertainty, their agency, and their access to honor in response to the Augustan marriage laws. The physical techniques utilized in the portraits reveal that freedwomen and their commemorators found in freedwomen’s portraits opportunities to make statements about the role of freedpeople in Roman life. By choosing between Greek and Roman styles, they decided to what extent they wanted to root themselves within traditional images of Roman power. By interacting with elite styles, they became part of a rapidly changing conception of what degree of agency was appropriate for women of all classes. By emphasizing the family, they scripted their own status in contrast to Roman stereotypes and laws that would denigrate it. However, as we shall see in the next section, this is not all the portraits do. In addition to reacting to broad cultural claims about freedmen and women, they are also sensitive to the individual stories of the deceased. Funerary portraits integrate the personal as well as the cultural into their depictions of freedwomen.
IV. Portraits and the Personal: Tracing Individual Lives

For the most part, we know very little about the individual lives of freedwomen commemorated in these portraits. In most cases, we do not even have the full picture of how they were commemorated. We may know what streets their tombs lay on (and often we do not even know that), but we may not know what each tomb looked like. This lack of information makes it difficult to glean information about the life, death, and commemoration of an individual woman, and we need that information in order to fully understand the meanings behind her portrait.

This information is vital because, without it, we often read the portraits as a monolith. We assume that because one portrait dates to the same period as another, the women commemorated must have shared the same experiences and had the same reactions to the cultural myths surrounding them. This assumption denies freedwomen the power to resist the social script and develop individual ideas of their lives apart from prevailing expectations. A focus on resistance, which I will utilize in this section, is another aspect of affect studies. In a modern analysis of lesbian identities, Susan Hekman sees resistance as a method of incorporating both the social script and the human body.86 Recognizing resistance denies neither the pressure of the social script nor the lived reality

of the human body. Instead, it says that these two dynamics coexist and interact to produce individual human experience.

Funerary portraits reflect in some ways affective acceptance of or resistance to the prevailing social scripts of the late Republican and Augustan periods. This section will explore interactions with social scripts by discussing two portraits for which we have slightly more information and a slightly greater chance to trace individual uses of the funerary portrait genre. We will focus on the portraits of two late Republican or Augustan women, Atistia and Usia Prima, and detail the ways in which their portraits interact with both their personal lives and cultural myths in order to form idealized views of these two women. We do not know everything about Atistia and Usia Prima—indeed, we still know very little, and we will of course never know their individual perceptions, attitudes, and reactions—but we know slightly more about them than many of the others, and perhaps this knowledge is just enough to help us document the intersections of the cultural and the individual in these portraits.

ATISTIA AND HER TOMB

Although the name Atistia is not well known, the tomb she shares with her husband is one of Rome’s most recognizable funerary monuments. It is called ‘The Tomb of the Baker.’ Sometime in the late Republican or early Augustan period, this tomb was built for a wealthy baker named Marcus Vergilius Eurusaces and his wife, Atistia, and it has captured scholarly attention since it was uncovered in 1838.87 Located on the ancient

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Via Labicana and Via Praenestina, this tomb must have been highly successful in the competition for viewers common to the late Republican and Augustan periods. Three façades are now extant, and the tomb still draws visitors, probably in much the same way as it did over 2000 years ago. Now, though, the tomb appears to belong to only one member of the original couple. Atistia has become a footnote, while her husband has become famous as ‘the baker.’ As we shall, see, though, Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces has always been the more visible of the two. In its ancient context, Atistia’s role in their portrait was to glorify her husband and make sure that his reputation survived for posterity.

The North, West, and South Façades

The rhombozoidal monument features a unique and highly detailed design that draws in the viewer from first glance. It has a rubble and concrete core faced with travertine on a tufa foundation. On the top of the extant north, west, and south sides, friezes depict scenes of bread-making leading from each corner with the final stage of the scene centered on each side. Beneath, the three façades contain horizontally placed cylinders that Paola Ciancio Rossetto believes to be bread-kneading machines, based on comparison with evidence from Pompeii—or possibly, as others argue, tools for measuring a unit of grain. Then, there is a repeated inscription reading, “est hoc monumentum Marcei Vergilei Eurysacis pistoris redemptoris appareat” (Corpus

Inscriptionum Latinarum I.2, 1204),\textsuperscript{90} translated as either “this is the monument of Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces, baker, contractor—it’s obvious”\textsuperscript{91} or “…baker, contractor, public servant” with apparet understood as an abbreviation for apparitoris.\textsuperscript{92} Finally, there are vertical column-esque cylinders that Paola Ciancio Rossetto has found to consist of three stacked versions of the kneading machines.\textsuperscript{93} Overall, the code of these three sides of the monument is consistent—Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces celebrates his professional status as a wealthy baker in a period when bread was vital for feeding Rome.

It is important to note what is missing in the monument’s inscription on these three sides: Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces does not explicitly label himself as a freedman or as a freeborn citizen. As discussed early in this paper, the absence of explicit status markers makes it impossible to be completely sure that Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces was freed. This uncertainty is common: in a study using every fifth epitaph in Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum VI, Pertti Huttunen discovered that only thirty-one percent of those commemorated in inscriptions explicitly mark their enslaved, freed, or freeborn status.\textsuperscript{94} David Noy describes this absence as an assimilation strategy designed to allow the deceased to claim Roman status and believes that it was employed by former slaves

\textsuperscript{90} This rendition is from the monument’s west façade. The inscription is repeated with slight variations on three sides, Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum I.2, 1203 and 1205.
\textsuperscript{91} Paola Ciancio Rossetto, Il Sepolcro del Fornaio Marco Vergilio Eurisace a Porta Maggiore (Rome: Istituto di Studi Romani, 1973), 36.
\textsuperscript{93} Ciancio Rossetto, Il Sepolcro del Fornaio, 29.
\textsuperscript{94} Pertti Huttunen, “The Social Strata in the Imperial City of Rome: A Quantitative Study of the Social Representation in the Epitaphs Published in the Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, Volumen VI” (PhD Diss., University of Oulu, 1974): 129.
and immigrants.\textsuperscript{95} Thus, according to Noy, the absence of freed status markers does not necessarily mean that Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces was not freed. Instead, his name suggests that he most likely was. Henrik Mouritsen has found that parents of freeborn children tended to avoid Greek names such as Eurysaces, so if this study is correct, we can still assume that Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces was free, or, if not, almost certainly a descendent of freed slaves.\textsuperscript{96} For this reason, I will treat this monument as a tomb of a freedman and, likely although not certainly, his freed wife.

The East Façade

The destroyed east façade of Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces’ monument is very different from the other three sides. Excavators discovered a funerary portrait (\textbf{Fig. 11})\textsuperscript{97} featuring a togated man and a woman wearing a \textit{palla}, as well as an inscription giving the woman the name Atistia:

\begin{quote}
\textit{fuit Atistia uxor mihei}
\textit{femina optuma veixsit}
\textit{quoquis corporis reliqueiae}
\textit{quod superant sunt in}
\textit{hoc panario} (\textit{Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum I, 1206})
\end{quote}

Atistia was my wife
she lived as the best woman
the remains of her body
which survive are in
this breadbasket


\textsuperscript{96} Mouritsen, \textit{The Freedman in the Roman World}, 124-5.

\textsuperscript{97} Since Atistia’s head was stolen sometime in the 1934, this photograph is the best source for the original composition of the portrait. Hackworth Petersen, “The Baker, His Wife, and Her Breadbasket,” 253 n. 13.
Although it is impossible to be sure that the portrait and inscription belong to Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces’ monument, Diana Kleiner makes a strong argument based on the findspot and the absence of identification for the male figure—which, since he is named on all other sides of the monument, would be superfluous. Additionally, several reconstructions by Italo Gismondi and others convincingly set the portrait within the East facade’s upper register, reducing the number of horizontal cylinders on this side.

The east facade containing the portrait of Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces and Atistia, as well as Atistia’s inscription, would have been the first point of contact for visitors entering Rome along the Via Labicana or Via Praenestina. To residents of Rome, Eurysaces may have prioritized using his tomb as a business advertisement over commemorating his personal status, or perhaps the west facade—the narrowest side due to the angles of the surrounding roads—did not provide enough space for a full portrait. However, even for Roman residents, the unusual cylinders and friezes may have encouraged visitors to walk around the monument, and then the portrait’s break in style grabbed their attention, forcing them to engage with the monument and the deceased. This change in style matters. It suggests a very different goal from the rest of the professionally-focused monument, allowing this façade to explore Atistia’s identity as well as Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces’ and to address the themes of the citizen-family and the domestic ideal common to funerary portraits.

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99 In Ciancio Rossetti, *Il Sepolcro del Fornaio*, pl. 46.
Atistia’s Family

The portrait’s emphasis on the citizen-family is present both visually and in writing. Visually, Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces and Atistia utilize both the wave-effect and the recollection of *imagines* that display familial unity and status in the portraits. Although there is some space between the two figures, the drapery still draws the viewer’s eyes across both. The folds of the drapery form parallel diagonal lines, drawing the eye from Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces’ body up to Atistia’s shoulder or following her body down to his arm. Through the use of the wave-effect, the portrait presents Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces and Atistia as a package deal and emphasizes their relationship. The tilt of their heads augments this impression, suggesting that they are a married couple.\(^{100}\) In addition, even though their portrait is full-length rather than the more typical (and less expensive) bust, they may still evoke *imagines* or Roman public honorary statues. Thus, they are not only a family, but also a family of some standing worthy of this commemoration.

The inscription adds to this emphasis on the family by specifically allocating citizen-status. The inscription labels Atistia as an *uxor*, a term reserved for wives in legal marriages.\(^{101}\) With this specific reference to the couple’s legal status, the portrait joins in the late Republican and Augustan debates over the status and identity of freedwomen. Although the dating of this portrait is highly disputed and has been placed anywhere between 50 BCE and 5 CE,\(^{102}\) its emphasis on the legal family would have been part of

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\(^{100}\) Kleiner, *Roman Group Portraiture*, 22-5.

\(^{101}\) Kleiner, *Roman Group Portraiture*, 25.

the broad public discourse on the role of freedwomen throughout this period. An emphasis upon citizenship allows Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces and Atistia to demonstrate that they are no longer slaves and to shore up their worth against contemporary elite pejorative views of freedpeople. Through the term *uxor* and the visual language of marriage, the couple makes the citizen-family a marker of success.

So far, Atistia’s portrait has used the same patterns as most other freedwomen’s portraits: it emphasizes the citizen-family and draws upon both the wave-effect and the evocation of *imaginés* to affirm her family’s status in a moment when that status was the center of a cultural debate. When we look more closely at the portrait and the inscription, however, Atistia appears unique, and the few facts we can glean about her life begin to matter.

The Bread Wife

Atistia’s position as the wife of a wealthy baker is critical to understanding her portrait. Through the motif of breadmaking, the portrait attempts to reconcile familial and professional identities by portraying Atistia as a commodity. Our extra information beyond the portrait, namely, the motifs and inscriptions on the other three façades of the tomb, invites us to understand the portrait as part of an overall message. This knowledge of the overall design of the tomb is unavailable for most funerary portraits but is critical here. Placed in context, it becomes clear that the portrait expects Atistia to play both the role of wife and *mater familias*, “mother of the family,” and that of a loaf of bread. Through these roles, the portrait casts Atistia as both publically and privately submissive in order to glorify Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces’ success. In the image of his bread/wife,
Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces attempts to balance two competing social scripts: a growing freed emphasis on professionalism with the elite expectation of (at least nominal) distance from these professions.

While this portrait, like many others, relies upon imagery of the citizen-family, Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces and Atistia are not portrayed as equal partners in their marriage. Instead, Atistia is both visually and textually secondary to her husband. Atistia appears slightly smaller than her husband, and her body leans away from the center of the portrait. In contrast, Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces leans toward the center, and the depiction of his right hand over his chest emphasizes this movement toward the center-line. As he subtly occupies more space within the portrait, he also grabs the eye of the audience. The portrait suggests that he is the figure to watch. This emphasis upon Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces is all the more striking because the east façade is the only one to mention or depict Atistia, whereas the other three facades display Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces’ name and profession. Thus, even when she does appear, Atistia’s figure is lesser than her husband’s in much the same way as her portrait is merely one component of a much larger tomb.

In the inscription, Atistia’s subordinate status derives first from the phrase *uxor mihei*, “my wife.” Even though the inscription appears to focus on Atistia, *mihei* (my) presents Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces as its author. By narrating the inscription, he quite literally scripts Atistia’s identity in it. Thus, the inscription implies that Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces has control over the tomb and its representations. Further on, the phrase *in/ hoc panario*, usually translated as “in this breadbasket,” strengthens Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces’ control over Atistia. An ash urn in the shape of a cylindrical basket—now
lost—was found in the area during the 1838 excavation, and this could be the *panarium* of the inscription. Thematically, this urn and the reference to it on the inscription tie the east side of the monument into the overall impression of professional achievement. The use of *panario* anticipates the focus on baking Eurysaces’ audience would encounter as they passed the monument’s other sides, but this time Atistia—not a loaf of bread—is the product. The inscription implies that Eurysaces has made himself a wife from scratch. The phrase denies Atistia agency since she is no longer a person but rather a product, and it denies her a history. A loaf of bread does not exist before its creator, and likewise Atistia does not exist without Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces. In both of her identities—wife and loaf of bread—she exists only in relation to him.

Atistia’s two roles reflect a tension between private and public spheres. Given the sense of the ‘shameful’ freedwoman that grew throughout this period and became codified in the Augustan marriage laws, the language *uxor* may attempt to separate Atistia from an association with *infames* and instead script her within the domestic ideal. Atistia is first and foremost a wife, and a thoroughly appropriate one for her husband. This emphasis on Atistia’s familial relationship, in addition to proclaiming her citizen-status, brings her into the realm of the female domestic ideal of the *mater familias*, “mother of the family.” This term in many ways encapsulates the female domestic ideal of the period. A *mater familias* was expected to be private, sexually pure, and responsible for the upkeep of her home and her home’s honor.103

In contrast, the mater familias’ husband was the pater familias. The Roman notion of pater familias is notoriously difficult to encapsulate: although literally it means “father of the household,” the term held dual meanings of both estate owner and stereotypically male figure in opposition to the sexually pure mater familias.\textsuperscript{104} As Atistia’s husband, Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces assumes the role of the pater familias. He scripts his authority over the private sphere through demonstrating his power over his wife, and he reaffirms his masculine power in contrast to her feminine submission. Thus, Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces fits the secondary meaning of pater familias smoothly. He struggles, however, when it comes to the first meaning of the term: estate owner. In the late Republican and Augustan periods, this aspect of the pater familias referred to the Roman male ideal of the elite gentleman farmer who lives off the land rather than maintaining what was seen as a low-brow professional career.

As a baker, Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces is far too professional for this dimension of the pater familias. Rather than displaying his professional status as a failure to be a pater familias, however, he celebrates this aspect of his identity by treating Atistia as a loaf of bread and using breadmaking reliefs on the other three façades of the monument. This engagement with professional labor began to emerge as a theme in freedpeople’s funerary epitaphs in the late Republican and Augustan periods. By the second and third centuries CE, almost half of the epitaphs used in one study list the deceased’s occupation.\textsuperscript{105} Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces must have been a trend-setter; Atistia’s in hoc panario and these three sides of his monument are a clear testament to his pride in

\textsuperscript{104} Saller, “Pater Familias, Mater Familias, and the Gendered Semantics of the Roman Household,” 182, 194.
\textsuperscript{105} Joshel, Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome, 102.
his work. This pride, however, makes it difficult for him to complete the image of the
*pater familias* because his professionalism is incompatible with the image of the
gentleman farmer.

Instead, through Atistia’s two roles—wife and *mater familias* in relation to the
familial dimension of the *pater familias* and loaf of bread in relation to Marcus Vergilius
Eurysaces’ professionalism—the inscription attempts to balance the roles of *pater
familias* and professional. Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces attempts to lay claim to the
aspects of the *pater familias* and the elite masculine ideal that work for him, namely
control over his wife and—through her—the private realm. Simultaneously, he attempts
to demonstrate his professional accomplishments at a time when this motif was beginning
to gain force in freedpeople’s representations. Through Atistia’s domesticity and
dehumanization, the portrait attempts to demonstrate Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces’
success in both the private and the public realms.

Reading Atistia

It is unusual to be able to place a portrait within the context of its original tomb.
In the case of Atistia, however, this added information is invaluable. Without the rest of
the tomb to emphasize Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces’ declaration of his wealth and
professionalism, the portrait simply appears to follow the emphasis on the citizen-family
prominent in the late Republican and Augustan period, with perhaps a little added
intrigue through the phrase *in/ hoc panario*. This interpretation, however, would miss the
ways in which Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces constructs his relationship with Atistia as
only one, private aspect of his identity in balance with a larger public and professional
theme. Indeed, that one curious phrase *in hoc panario* would make little sense without the context of the rest of the tomb.

In context, the portrait depicts Atistia is a counterpoint to Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces’ professional identity. She allows him to claim the role of *pater familias* at least in part and express that his public success extends to private control over his affairs and over the body of his wife. Atistia rounds out Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces’ identity. Although she has no agency in this portrait and is instead defined through her submissiveness, this very lack of agency allows her husband to augment his status. As she becomes first his wife and finally his product, Atistia allows Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces to add a dash of patriarchy to his professional tomb.

FREEDWOMEN’S AGENCY IN THE PORTRAIT OF USIA PRIMA

Around the same time as Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces and Atistia became commemorated in stone, another freedwoman’s funerary portrait was erected that opted for anything but the image of male control and female domestic deference. Unlike the portrait of Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces and Atistia, we do not know the original context of the portrait, other than that it came from the Via Appia.\(^{106}\) However, much like Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces’ breadmaking friezes, this portrait’s references to the dead woman’s civic status allow us to situate her within a specific Roman context and decode the significance of her portrait.

The portrait of Usia Prima (**Fig. 12**) celebrates the dead woman’s success as a priestess, removing her from both the domestic ideal and language of the citizen-family

\(^{106}\) Kleiner, *Roman Group Portraiture*, 231.
common to freedwomen’s portraits. Through these choices, the portrait answers freedwomen’s double uncertainty by making Usia Prima’s agency certain and refuses to acknowledge the contemporary discourses of the ‘shameful’ or male-controlled freedwoman.

Like that of the tomb of Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces and Atistia, the dating of Usia Prima’s portrait is uncertain. While Kleiner argues for a date between 13 BCE and 5 CE based on drapery and hairstyles,\(^{107}\) the label at the Museo Nazionale provides a date around 40 BCE. Additionally, Kleiner believes that Usia Prima’s hair was recarved during the Flavian period, but the overall composition of the portrait is late Republican or Augustan.\(^{108}\) This uncertainty makes it difficult to pinpoint the portrait in regards to a specific moment in the evolution of Roman views of freedwomen, but the portrait is clearly in dialogue with the competing conceptions of freedwomen’s agency throughout this period.

Focusing away from the Family

Usia Prima is the main focus of the portrait. Her primacy is visible at first glance; although she shares the portrait with two other figures, Gaius Rabirius Hermodorus and Rabiria Demaris, the composition of the portrait guides viewers to her face. The portrait shifts the left and center figures, Gaius Rabirius Hermodorus and Rabiria Demaris, slightly toward the left side of the portrait so that the center-line of the portrait hits the side of Rabiria Demaris’ face, which is tilted to look at Usia Prima. Rabiria Demaris’

\(^{107}\) Kleiner, *Roman Group Portraiture*, 231.

glance pushes the focal point of the portrait past the center-line towards the space dominated by this last figure. Usia Prima takes up almost half the portrait. There is blank space past her left shoulder while, in contrast, Gaius Rabirius Hermodorus is crammed against the edge of the portrait. Additionally, two key symbols, both of which will be discussed shortly, frame her figure and extend the space she occupies within the portrait. Here, the use of space and the symbols on the background surrounding Usia Prima signal her importance.

Although Usia Prima is depicted alongside Gaius Rabirius Hermodorus and Rabiria Demaris, the portrait does not emphasize any form of familial relationship with them. Since she does not share the name Rabiria, she is not their colliberta, fellow freedperson with the same patron. It is unlikely that she was married to Gaius Rabirius Hermodorus since the two are not next to each other and do not use any of the typical gestures indicating marriage. Although it is possible that she was still related to them in some other way, the portrait emphasizes visual separation rather than conjoining and allows for the possibility that she was connected to the two in some other way than family ties—perhaps they worked together, perhaps they were friends. What is clear is that she, in some way, is “linked to” Gaius Rabirius Hermodorus and Rabiria Demaris and linked as their superior rather than their equal. This is a significant break from the articulation of freedwomen’s identities found in most other portraits. Usia Prima opts out of the domestic ideal that is grounded in the citizen-family.

Instead of domesticity, religious status becomes the basis for Usia Prima’s identity. Both the written and visual language of Usia Prima’s portrait focus on her achievements as a priestess. In the inscription, she is called sac(erdos) Isidis, a priestess
of Isis, and—perhaps in case a viewer were illiterate—the symbols surrounding her connote her vocation visually. To the left of Usia Prima’s head is a sistrum, a musical instrument, and to her left is a patera, a shallow libation bowl. These two symbols were associated with the cult of Isis, and the depiction of the patera in particular signifies Usia Prima as not only a worshipper of Isis, but one of the goddess’ priestesses. The label sac(erdos), “priest(ess),” reinforces this visual code and adds further significance. The title sacerdos was reserved for typically male higher-ranking officials, and large cult centers such as Rome’s would likely have had several high-ranking priests who each held a title such as egregius sacerdos, summus sacerdos, maximus sacerdos, or primarius sacerdos—all of which essentially translate to “high priest.”

Usia Prima’s inclusion in their number speaks to her prestige and power within Rome’s cult of Isis. Usia Prima’s portrait makes no mention of the domestic realm expected for women. Instead, it frames her in terms of her religious accomplishments, another acceptable route to status for Roman women. In this cult, however, Usia Prima shared a title and, likely, some responsibilities with men. As Sandra Joshel puts it, Usia Prima and women like her “shared work…with men.” As a result, “these women, at least in death, were linked with their male counterparts more than they were links between them.” Usia Prima’s portrait makes her men’s peer—if not their superior—in the public life of the city and ties her to a cult that was becoming prominent within Rome.

111 Sandra Joshel, Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome, 142.
Resisting Shame, Resisting Domesticity

Through this focus on civic stature, Usia Prima’s portrait argues that female agency is a source of pride rather than shame. As a successful public woman, Usia Prima is shown as autonomous and self-controlling. In contrast to Atistia, who only exists in relation to her husband, Usia Prima’s identity is independent of the other figures depicted on the portrait. The portrait suggests that she makes her own choices and governs her own life. By focusing on her independence and agency, Usia Prima’s portrait refuses to engage either the Augustan link between freedwomen and *infames* or the period’s emphasis on the domestic ideal.

Usia Prima is far from the ideal domestic freedwoman. The portrait makes no mention of *pudicitia* and its assumptions of modesty built upon matrimony. The absence of explicit domestic imagery or evidence of familial relations suggests that Usia Prima or her commemorators resist this expectation by refusing to acknowledge it at all. The portrait acts as though expectations of women’s domesticity simply do not exist. Instead, the portrait replaces the domestic realm with the religious realm, another publically acceptable source of dignity for women. Usia Prima does not lack an ideal wife’s honor due to the absence of domestic imagery, but rather gains a different form of honor through her priesthood. This shift in emphasis uses the latter sphere while glossing over the former.

Although Usia Prima uses her religious ties in order to gain an alternate form of honor without reference to domesticity, even this might not be enough to separate her from another contemporary view present in Augustan laws, that of the shameful freedwoman. While female priestesses such as the Vestal Virgins were highly respected,
Isis was not the most appropriate goddess to serve. The late first and early second century CE poet Juvenal uses the phrase *Isiaca...sacraria lenae*, “the sanctuaries of Isis the brothel-keeper” (*Satires* VI.489), suggesting that all women who worked at the temple or worshipped the goddess were prostitutes. Although it is problematic to assume that a stereotype from the late first century CE was also present in the late first century BCE, Isis was a fairly new and ‘dangerous’ goddess in Roman eyes in this earlier period. The Senate was frequently hostile to the cult, and Cicero and other elite writers associate Isiac followers with rebellion.\(^{112}\) Thus, it is likely that many of Juvenal’s stereotypes about the cult also existed in its early days. The same connection between Isis and *infames* (since this category included prostitutes) may have existed in the late Republican and Augustan periods.

Nevertheless, the audience would not guess this connection to *infames* from Usia Prima’s portrait. As Lisa Hughes puts it, “the representation of Usia Prima was not as an immoral woman.”\(^{113}\) The portrait resists the assimilation of both freedwomen and women in the cult of Isis to *infames*, making Usia Prima’s priesthood a source of pride rather than shame. The portrait’s streamlined idealization of Usia Prima as a powerful agent creates a script of her success that leaves no room for other interpretations, such as that she is shameful or failing at the domestic ideal, to exist. Usia Prima’s portrait subverts these scripts by denying their existence altogether.


CONCLUSION: ATISTIA, USIA PRIMA, AND INTERACTIONS WITH THE SOCIAL SCRIPT

The portraits of Atistia and Usia Prima craft two very different idealized representations of freedwomen. While the first adheres to the domestic ideal and ultimately presents the freedwoman only in relation only to her husband, the latter refuses to acknowledge that a domestic ideal exists and instead focuses on independence and agency through status in a religious community. In many ways, Usia Prima is closer to Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces than she is to Atistia—portraits of both emphasize their public achievements and expect their audience to see them as the focus of the portrait. Atistia and Usia Prima have one important thing in common, however: they both interact with the same set of cultural expectations that surrounded the lives of freedwomen. Both Atistia and Usia Prima ignore the contemporary image of the shameful freedwoman, but there their similarities end. On the one hand, Atistia’s portrait refers to the domestic ideal of honor through marriage and male dominance. Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces scripts her identities, and the portrait denies her agency. Usia Prima’s portrait, on the other hand, rejects the domestic ideal in order to emphasize pride in her status and her level of agency.

The differences between these two portraits demonstrate the ways in which cultural expectations are not unilateral forces that press down upon individuals and force them to assimilate. Instead, as both portraits demonstrate, individuals have the ability to ignore some cultural expectations while engaging with others, accepting their terms, and thereby furthering the power of those expectations. This concept of the portraits as interacting with and transforming the social script brings us back into the realm of affect.
studies. As Anne Cvetkovich writes, individuals are both “part of…history and outside it.”\textsuperscript{114} As Atistia and Usia Prima’s portraits interact with their late Republican or Augustan contexts, they respond to broad historical trends and simultaneously exist among and shape those trends. Atistia’s portrayal within a domestic ideal reinforces that ideal, while Usia Prima’s portrait’s refusal to play the part of wife and mother challenges the validity of these roles.

As they document individual encounters with broader culture, the portraits become “archives of feelings.”\textsuperscript{115} This is not to say that the portraits reveal how Atistia or Usia Prima individually ‘felt about’ their society—again, the portraits reflect idealized views rather than individual lives. What the portraits do reveal, however, are the formations of particular ideals in response to particular cultural moments. The portraits record individual choices to promote or oppose contemporary views of freedwomen, likely made by whoever commissioned the portrait (who may or may not have been the freedwomen themselves). The portraits of Atistia and Usia Prima demonstrate the ways in which commemorators picked from facets of an individual life—a woman’s marital status, public achievements, or many other elements—in order to create a highly individualized interaction with the social scripts available.

In the case of Atistia and Usia Prima, we are lucky to know just a little bit more about them than we do about many of the freedwomen. We know what Atistia’s tomb looked liked as well as some details about her husband’s profession, and we know a fair

\textsuperscript{115} Anne Cvetkovich, “Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel’s ‘Fun Home,’” 119.
amount about the cult that Usia Prima celebrates. These added details give us insights into these two portraits’ methods of incorporating or resisting cultural norms and allow us to situate the portraits within the context of elements of these individual lives and deaths. In this light, the two portraits present opposite reactions to cultural norms. They reveal the diversity of freedwomen’s funerary commemorations and demonstrate that cultural expectations are not static, but instead are constantly negotiated by the freedwomen, their family, and the entire population of Rome.
V. The Decline of the Portraits

After a boom in the early Augustan period, the funerary portrait genre disappeared sometime around 5 CE. In its place, *columbaria*, communal tombs, became the signature funerary style of freedpeople. Although portraits continued to be used on funerary altars, the large, independent structures featuring portrait reliefs became a thing of the past.

CHANGING IDENTITIES

Changing social customs and changing expectations for freedpeople and all Romans may have informed the disappearance of the portrait genre. The decline of Republican elite identities may be part of this picture. Valerie M. Hope suggests that the rise of Augustus made elite competition—including in the funerary realm—almost irrelevant. With his grandiose tomb, Augustus coopted and outshone the Republican elite monumental tomb style. Suddenly, there was no point in building a large tomb since the power it once signified was consolidated in the hands of the emperor, and the emperor could build these tombs bigger and better anyway.\footnote{Valerie M. Hope, “Constructing Roman Identity: Funerary Monuments and Social Structure in the Roman World,” *Mortality* 2.2 (1997): 111, accessed 2 July 2013, doi: 1357-6275/97/020103-19.} As the large elite monuments gradually declined throughout the Augustan period, freedpeople interested in echoing their accomplishments may have also backed away from this tomb style. Thus, a large
portrait relief attached to a large tomb began to refer to an outmoded form of Roman identity.

Changes in freedpeople’s conception of family may also have led to the decline of the portrait genre. In the Augustan period, *columbaria* began appearing. These communal tombs reflected “a new pattern of servile association at burial and commemoration that was firmly centred on the household.”\(^\text{117}\) Instead of tombs typically based around the freed family, *columbaria* often featured *colliberti*—freedpeople who had the same patron—or members of the same occupational guild. Although funerary portraits had always featured groups that do not appear to be connected by familial ties on occasion, these earlier tombs rarely hold more than three to four people. *Columbaria*, in contrast, could contain considerably more. The *columbarium* of imperial slaves and freedpeople could contain thousands.\(^\text{118}\)

Where they were composed of *colliberti*, these *columbaria* reveal a growing sense of connection with the enslaved family, which included all members of their former master’s household. A growing sense of connection to this enslaved family may have led freedpeople to emphasize this family instead of a freed nuclear family. This transition away from the nuclear family may have resulted from the Augustan reforms that made

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freedpeople more dependent on their patrons. As the enslaved family became more important, displaying membership in this group likely became a method of demonstrating status. Belonging to a *columbarium* may have replaced the prestige once gained from freed nuclear relatives, making the funerary portrait genre a thing of the past.

Finally, as the portraits declined, explicit affect became more deeply engrained in Roman funerary epitaphs. Romans of all classes—including freedpeople—moved away from the simple, name-and-title-based formulae used in the portraits toward more Hellenistic epigrams and other formulae that encouraged affective language. Phrases such as *bene merenti*, “for the well-deserving,” became commonplace, and more elaborate expressions of commemorators’ grief appeared. Thus, where emphasis on the nuclear family persisted, it often took on this affective form rather than the explicit display of status critical to the portraits’ depictions of family. The textual emphasis on status through the family predominant in the portraits was discarded, and affective views of the family became more important than textual views.

The depictions of freedwomen change as the portraits fade and ideals mutate, but I will leave it to a future study to examine these changes thoroughly. As new ideals arose, the epitaphs of freedwomen undoubtedly reflected these new ideals. As they left the portrait genre behind, freedwomen and their commemorators had to find new depictions to match these new Roman identities. Sandra Joshel offers a few clues. Two freedwomen, Avillia Philusa and Rufa, dedicate tombs that explicitly label both themselves and the

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men in their lives by profession, emphasizing these shared occupations. These two women are part of a broader trend of emphasizing group membership over the nuclear family, and they demonstrate their status through these commonalities with men. In doing so, they offer a sense that the fundamental question of women’s participation and status continued to be relevant after the decline of the funerary portrait genre. Undoubtedly, responses to this question and strategies for presenting women were as varied after the decline of the genre as they had been during its peak, but examining these responses will be a job for the future.

CLINGING TO THE PAST

There were a scattered few freedpeople who continued to use the funerary portrait genre after the Augustan period. Francesca Volpi identifies two possible reasons for their continued use: freedpeople wanted to echo “the custom of their predecessors” in the tradition of Roman respect for this value, the mos maiorum, or they wanted to “distinguish themselves from other freedpeople, as though they wanted to reconnect to those of the Republican era.” In either case, their goals were “far from the causes that had informed the birth of the reliefs.”

121 Joshel, Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome, 142.

122 “I pocchissimi liberti, che continuarono a far uso nelle tombe dei rilievi, lo fecero probabilmente per due motivi: perché questo era stata l’usanza dei loro predecessori—non dimentichiamo che il mos maiorum fu una delle idee cardine della società romana—e per distinguersi dagli altri liberti, come a volersi riallacciare a quelli repubblicani; tuttavia quasi sicuramente, erano, lontane dalle loro menti le cause che avevano determinate la nascita dei rilievi.” Francesca Volpi, “Rilievi Funerari Urbani con Busti-Ritratto,” in Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università degli Studi di Perugia 24.10 (1986/7): 279.
genre were not purely rebirthing Republican ideals. Instead, they were consciously breaking from the customs of their periods, either in deference to the past or out of an attempt to separate themselves from contemporary ideals. By using the portraits to avoid the present, these freedpeople emphasized just how old-fashioned the genre had become. By the end of the age of Augustus, the contemporary relevance of the funerary portrait had vanished and was not to return. Freedpeople began valuing different idealized representations, choosing different practices to reflect these new ideals, and exploring new physical forms to represent new concepts of freed identity.
Conclusion

Freedwomen’s funerary portraits navigate a complex set of expectations in order to craft a variety of unique idealized views of a woman’s life and identity. In life, the freedwomen navigated a world that expected them to be independent and yet controlled, incapable of honor yet honorable. Death was no different. In their funerary portraits, freedwomen and their commemorators used strategies including echoing particular cultural traditions, interacting with the art of the elite, and depicting the citizen-family in order to make a claim about the identity of the deceased. Each commemorator of a freedwoman had to choose for himself or herself what route to pick and which expectations to engage. Their choices matter; the choice of a particular style or the inclusion of particular language on an epitaph signaled to the world who that freedwoman was and what values her heirs and commemorators held.

This study has focused on the construction of freedwomen in the funerary portrait genre, but there are several points of departure that I will leave to future works to explore. I focus on epitaphs produced in one city in one relatively narrow span of time, about eighty years. Although I touch upon the possible Greek influences upon the portrait genre, I do not question how Roman funerary practices affected or were affected by myriad other provincial traditions from the rapidly expanding empire. I do not look closely at the changes in practices before or beyond this period. Additionally, while I
focus on the forms of femininity in these portraits, I do not look at corresponding views of masculinity except insofar as they are constructed through freedwomen.

The freedpeople funerary portrait genre has the potential to reveal images of Roman identity at a key moment of transition. As freedpeople, a group defined by their former lack of agency and honor, designed the form of Roman identity they wanted to assume, their choices reveal cultural values and aspirations. These portraits offer a rare glimpse into eighty years in the heart of Rome. The eyes of the freedwomen still stare out at their audience two thousand years later, and their memory still resonates through the names they carry and the identities they convey.
Figures

Figure 1

Lucius Vibius, Vicilia Hilara, Lucius Vibius Felix, and Vibia Prima, 13 BCE-5 CE

FIGURE 2

Clodia Stacte, Numerius Clodius, and Caius Anna Quinctio, 75-50 BCE

Lucius Occius, Lucius Occius, and Occia Agathea, 75-50 BCE

FIGURE 4

Lucius Ampudius Philomusus and two women, 13 BCE-5 CE

Gratidia Chrite and Marcus Gratidius Libanus, 13 BCE-5 CE

FIGURE 6

Quintus (?) Aelius and Licinia Athena, 75-50 BCE

FIGURE 7

This image not licensed for online distribution.

Furia, Publius Furius, Furia, Furia, and Gaius Suiricius, 13 BCE-5 CE

FIGURE 8

Portrait of four unknown individuals, central pair in dextrarum iunctio, 13 BCE-5 CE
FIGURE 9

[Lucius] [B]ennius Bassus, Bennia Musa, and Lucius Benni[us] Anic[    ], 30-13 BCE

FIGURE 10

Three unnamed individuals, 30-13 BCE

Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces and Atistia, late Republican or Augustan

Gaius Rabirius Hermodorus, Rabiria Demaris, Usia Prima

Current location: Museo Nazionale. Image: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom negative D-DAI-ROM-73.800. Inscription: Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum VI, 2246
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