



A COMPANION TO
ROMAN ART

EDITED BY BARBARA E. BORG



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TO ROMAN ART**

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Contents

| | |
|---|------------|
| Notes on Contributors | viii |
| List of Abbreviations | xiv |
| List of Illustrations | xv |
| Introduction <i>Barbara E. Borg</i> | 1 |
| Part I Methods and Approaches | 9 |
| 1 Defining Roman Art <i>Christopher H. Hallett</i> | 11 |
| 2 Roman Historical Representations <i>Tonio Hölscher</i> | 34 |
| 3 Methodological Approaches to the Dating and Identification of Roman Portraits <i>Klaus Fittschen</i> | 52 |
| 4 Roman Art and Gender Studies <i>Natalie Kampen</i> | 71 |
| PART II The Beginnings and End of Roman Art | 93 |
| 5 Republican Rome and Italic Art <i>Massimiliano Papini</i> | 95 |
| 6 Adapting Greek Art <i>Rachel Kousser</i> | 114 |
| 7 The Art of Late Antiquity: A Contextual Approach <i>Alessandra Bravi</i> | 130 |
| Part III Producing and Commissioning Roman Art | 151 |
| 8 Technique and Message in Roman Art <i>Mont Allen</i> | 153 |

| | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 9 | Roman Art and the Artist <i>Michael Squire</i> | 172 |
| 10 | Roman Art and the State <i>Peter J. Holliday</i> | 195 |
| 11 | “Arte Plebea” and Non-elite Roman Art <i>Lauren Hackworth Petersen</i> | 214 |

PART IV Genres 231

| | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 12 | Roman Portraits <i>Jane Fejfer</i> | 233 |
| 13 | Wall Painting <i>Katharina Lorenz</i> | 252 |
| 14 | Mosaics <i>Roger Ling</i> | 268 |
| 15 | Roman Sarcophagi <i>Michael Koortbojian</i> | 286 |
| 16 | Decorative Art <i>Friederike Sinn</i> | 301 |
| 17 | Luxury Arts <i>Kenneth Lapatin</i> | 321 |
| 18 | Roman Architecture as Art? <i>Edmund Thomas</i> | 344 |

PART V Contexts 365

Section 1 Roman Art and “Private Space” 367

| | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 19 | Art in Roman Town Houses <i>Simon Ellis</i> | 369 |
| 20 | Art in the Roman Villa <i>Richard Neudecker</i> | 388 |
| 21 | The Decoration of Private Space in the Later Roman Empire <i>Susanne Muth</i> | 406 |

Section 2 Roman Art and Death 429

| | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 22 | The Decoration of Roman Tombs <i>Francisca Feraudi-Gruénais</i> | 431 |
| 23 | Catacombs and the Beginnings of Christian Tomb Decoration <i>Norbert Zimmermann</i> | 452 |

Section 3 Roman Art and the Empire 471

| | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 24 | The Greek East under Rome <i>Roland R.R. Smith</i> | 473 |
|----|---|-----|

| | | |
|--|--|------------|
| 25 | The Western Roman Provinces <i>Roger J.A. Wilson</i> | 496 |
| PART VI Themes | | 531 |
| 26 | Contextualizing Roman Art and Nature <i>Maureen Carroll</i> | 533 |
| 27 | Roman Art and Spectacle <i>Zahra Newby</i> | 552 |
| 28 | Roman Art and Myth <i>Francesco de Angelis</i> | 569 |
| PART VII Reception of Roman Art in the Modern World | | 585 |
| 29 | The Myth of Pompeii: Fragments, Frescos, and the Visual Imagination <i>Rosemary J. Barrow</i> | 587 |
| 30 | Roman Architecture through the Ages <i>Stefan Altekamp</i> | 602 |
| | Index | 620 |

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List of Abbreviations

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|----------------|--|
| ANRW | Temporini, H. (ed.) (1972–) <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> . De Gruyter, Berlin. |
| CIG | <i>Corpus inscriptionum Graecarum</i> |
| CIL | <i>Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum</i> |
| EAA | <i>Enciclopedia dell'arte antica classica e orientale</i> |
| FGrHist | Jacoby, F. (1923–) <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> . Brill, Leiden. |
| ICUR | <i>Inscriptiones christianae urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores</i> , vols. 1–. Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Vatican City 1857–. |
| IG | <i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> |
| IGUR | Moretti, L. (ed.) (1968–1990) <i>Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae</i> , vols. 1–4. Bardi, Rome. |
| LIMC | Ackermann, H.C. and Gisler, J.R. <i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i> , vols. 1–8 and suppl. Artemis, Zürich (1981–2009). |
| LTUR | Steinby, M. (ed.) (1993–96) <i>Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae</i> , vols. 1–6. Edizione Quasar, Rome. |
| LTUR Suburbium | La Regina, A. (ed.) (2001–08) <i>Lexikon Topographicum Urbis Romae, Suburbium</i> , vols. 1–5. Edizione Quasar, Rome. |
| OLD | Glare, P.G.H. (ed.) (2012) <i>The Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> , 2 vols. Oxford University Press, Oxford. |
| PPM | Baldassare, I., Lanzillotta, T., and Salomi, S. (eds.) (1990–2003) <i>Pompei: Pitture e Mosaici</i> , 11 vols. Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, Rome. |
| RIB | Haverfield, F. (ed.) <i>The Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i> . Clarendon Press and Oxbow Books, Oxford. |

List of Illustrations

| | | |
|------|--|----|
| 1.1 | Young Satyr. Rome, Capitoline Museum. Palazzo Nuovo, Sala di Galata, inv. S739. Photo: Archäologisches Institut, Cologne Digital Archaeology Laboratory, Universität zu Köln, Mal1963-3_15892 (www.arachne.uni-koeln.de). | 14 |
| 1.2 | “Campana plaque.” Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Francis Barlett Donation of 1900, inv. 03.885. Photo: © 2014 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. | 17 |
| 1.3 | Frieze from the Forum of Trajan. Rome, Vatican Museum. Museo Pio Gregoriano Profano, no. 9760. Photo: Vatican Museums. | 24 |
| 1.4 | Bronze sestertius of the emperor Claudius, 41–42 CE. Photo: Ex Nomos Auction 7, 15 May 2013, lot 160. | 25 |
| 1.5 | Statue of the emperor Hadrian. Rome, Capitoline Museum, Salone 13, inv. 634. Photo: Sansaini, Neg. D-DAI-ROM-55.275. | 26 |
| 1.6 | Drawing of Belvedere Torso by Mattheus Verheijden; Hamburg, Art Market. Drawing: <i>Meisterzeichnungen</i> , 1993, Nr. 13. Courtesy of Martin Moeller-Pisani. | 27 |
| 1.7 | Line drawing of a relief the Arch of Tiberius at Orange. After: <i>L’Arc d’Orange</i> by Robert Amy et al. (suppl. Gallia, XV, pl. 28). © CNRS Editions. | 28 |
| 1.8 | Sarcophagus showing a battle between Greeks and Galatians. Rome, Museo Capitolino, inv. S 213. Photo: Archäologisches Institut, Cologne Digital Archaeology Laboratory, Universität zu Köln, Mal1683-01_16417,03 (www.arachne.uni-koeln.de). | 29 |
| 1.9 | Marble relief panel. Rome, Villa Albani, inv. 1014. Photo: Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke, Munich, Photothek. | 30 |
| 1.10 | “Ecce Homo”, Christ before Pilate, by Ignazio Jacometti; Rome, Scala Santa, St. John the Lateran. Photo: Gregor Borg. | 31 |
| 2.1 | Rome, Column of Trajan. Photo: Fototeca Unione, American Academy in Rome. | 36 |
| 2.2 | Rome, Column of Trajan, distribution of subjects. © Tonio Hölscher. | 40 |
| 2.3 | Panel relief from an honorary arch of Marcus Aurelius. Rome, Arch of Constantine. Photo: Alinari Archives, Florence. Foto Anderson 2539. | 41 |

| | | |
|------|--|----|
| 2.4 | Rome, Ara Pacis Augustae, part of South frieze. Photo: Roma, Museo dell'Ara Pacis Augustae. | 42 |
| 2.5 | Relief frieze with battle scene from a monument of Antoninus Pius. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. I 865. Photo: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien. | 45 |
| 2.6 | Benevento, honorary arch of Trajan. Photo: Alinari Archives, Florence. Foto Alinari 11495. | 47 |
| 3.1 | Portrait of Julia Domna, Aureus. After J. Kent, B. Overbeck, A. Stylow, <i>Die römische Münze</i> (Munich 1973), pl. XVII 385. Courtesy of Hirmer Fotoarchiv Munich. | 54 |
| 3.2 | Marble portrait of Julia Domna; Stuttgart, Württembergisches Landesmuseum, inv. Arch 67/19. Photo: G. Fittschen-Badura. | 54 |
| 3.3 | Portrait of Julia Domna, Aureus. After L. von Matt, H. Kühner, <i>Die Caesaren</i> (Zurich, 1984), pl. 97a. Courtesy of Gemeinnützige Stiftung Leonard von Matt. | 55 |
| 3.4 | Marble portrait of Julia Domna, New Haven, Yale University Art Museum. Photo: Yale University, Art Gallery. | 55 |
| 3.5 | Marble portrait of Marcus Aurelius; Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 125960. Photo: G. Fittschen-Badura. | 60 |
| 3.6 | Marble portrait of Septimius Severus; Paris, Louvre MA 1113. Photo: G. Fittschen-Badura. | 60 |
| 3.7 | Marble portrait of Augustus; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. I 60. Photo: G. Fittschen-Badura. | 61 |
| 3.8 | Marble portrait of Augustus; Volterra, Museo Guarnacci. Photo: G. Fittschen-Badura. | 61 |
| 3.9 | Marble portrait of Trajan, Frankfurt, Liebieghaus, inv. I.N. 156. Photo: Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung. | 66 |
| 3.10 | Marble portrait of Trajan, Rome, Museo Capitolino, inv. 2967. Photo: G. Fittschen-Badura. | 66 |
| 4.1 | Detail of the "Elternpaarpfeiler" from Neumagen (Trier) showing the woman at her toilette. Photo: Ton Derks. | 73 |
| 4.2 | Door stele from Kutahya, Ankara, Roman Baths. Photo: M. Schede 1926, Neg. D-DAI-IST-3504, with kind permission from Ankara Müze Müdürlüğü. | 73 |
| 4.3 | Wall painting of Narcissus, north wall of cubiculum <i>i</i> of the House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii. Photo: Katharina Lorenz. | 75 |
| 4.4 | Antinoos Farnese. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Inv. no. 6030. Photo: Schwanke, Neg. D-DAI-ROM-83.1889. | 75 |
| 4.5 | Relief from a shop front at Ostia. Ostia, Museum, inv. 134. Photo: Schwanke, Neg. D-DAI-ROM-803236. | 77 |
| 4.6 | Medea before the murder of her children. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 8977. Photo: Olivierw/Wikimedia Commons. | 79 |
| 4.7 | Reconstruction of a room in the sanctuary of Nemi with the statues of Fundilius and Fundilia. Reconstruction © Jane Fejfer (drawing by Thora Fisker). | 80 |
| 4.8 | Heterosexual couple on a Roman lamp. Cologne, Römisch-Germanisches Museum. Photo: Marcus Cyron/Wikimedia Commons. | 83 |
| 4.9 | Dionysus/Bacchus. Rome, Museo Nazionale delle Terme inv. 622. Photo: Rossa, Neg. D-DAI-ROM-76.2000. | 84 |
| 5.1 | Apollo from Veii. Rome, Villa Giulia, inv. 40702-3. Photo: Archivio Fotografico della Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale. | 98 |

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 5.2 | Bronze statuette of a rider. The Detroit Institute of Arts 46.260. Photo: Detroit Institute of Arts, USA/City of Detroit Purchase/The Bridgeman Art Library. | 100 |
| 5.3 | Cista Ficoroni, Rome. Museum of Villa Giulia, inv. 24787. Photo: Archivio Fotografico della Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale. | 101 |
| 5.4 | Plate from Capena, Rome. Museum of Villa Giulia, inv. 23949. Photo: Archivio Fotografico della Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale. | 103 |
| 5.5 | Capitoline Brutus, Rome. Musei Capitolini, Palazzo dei Conservatori, Sala dei Trionfi, inv. MC 1183/S. Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini. | 104 |
| 5.6 | Arieti Tomb fresco, Rome. Musei Capitolini, Centrale Montemartini, inv. MC 2081/S. Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini. | 108 |
| 5.7 | Juno Cesi (second quarter of the second century BCE), Rome. Museo Capitolino, Sala del Galata, inv. MC 731/S. Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini. | 109 |
| 5.8 | Colossal head of Hercules, Rome. Musei Capitolini, Centrale Montemartini, inv. MC 2381/S. Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini. | 110 |
| 6.1 | Round temple in the Forum Boarium, Rome, Republican. Photo: Pufacz/Wikimedia Commons. | 117 |
| 6.2 | House of the Faun, Pompeii, second century BCE. Photo: E. Pernice, Neg. D-DAI-ROM 32.1315. | 119 |
| 6.3 | Statue of Mars Ultor. Rome, Musei Capitolini. Photo: Neg. D-DAI-ROM 3149. | 121 |
| 6.4 | Wall painting from the Villa Farnesina, Rome. Photo: Tetraktys/Wikimedia Commons. | 122 |
| 6.5 | Fragment of a Jupiter column, Sarrebourg. Trier, Rhieinisches Landesmuseum. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY. | 125 |
| 7.1 | Tondo portrait from Aphrodisias. Aphrodisias, Museum. Photo: Patrick Kelley with kind permission. | 132 |
| 7.2 | Detail of the Constantinian frieze on the Arch of Constantine, <i>largitio</i> scene. Photo: William Storage/Wikimedia Commons. | 134 |
| 7.3 | Colossal portrait of Constantine from the Basilica of Maxentius. Rome, Palazzo dei Conservatori. Photo: Jean-Christophe Benoist/Wikimedia Commons. | 134 |
| 7.4 | Distribution of images in the Forum of Constantine at Constantinople. © Alessandra Bravi. | 136 |
| 7.5 | Statues of Dionysus from Sagalassos. © Sagalassos Project with kind permission. | 137 |
| 7.6 | Silver plate from the Mildenhall Treasure. London, British Museum. Photo: JMiall/Wikimedia Commons. | 138 |
| 7.7 | Diptych of the Symmachi and Nicomachi. Paris, Louvre, and London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. 212-1865. Photo: Marsyas/Wikimedia Commons. | 140 |
| 7.8 | Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, cast. Rome, Museo della Civiltà Romana. Photo: Tetraktys/Wikimedia Commons. | 142 |
| 7.9 | Santa Maria Antiqua, fresco of Maria Regina. After: J. Wilpert, <i>Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis zum XIII. Jhr.</i> , vol. 4 (Herder, Freiburg, 1916), pl. 133. | 144 |
| 8.1 | Pavonazzetto statue of barbarian. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 6117. Photo: Mont Allen. | 158 |
| 8.2 | Rosso antico bust of Silenus. Baia, Museum, inv. 317959. Photo: Mont Allen. | 161 |
| 8.3 | Rosso antico torso of centaur. New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. 09.221.6. Photo: Mont Allen. | 162 |

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 8.4 | Porphyry sarcophagus of Helena. Rome, Vatican Museum, Museo Pio-Clementino, inv. 238. Photo: Mont Allen. | 163 |
| 8.5 | Terracotta Augustan temple antefix. New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. 96.18.162. Photo: Mont Allen. | 164 |
| 8.6 | Gigantomachy group from Silahtarğa. Istanbul, Archaeological Museum. Photo: Mont Allen. | 166 |
| 8.7 | “Annona sarcophagus.” Rome, National Museum, Palazzo Massimo, inv. 40799. Photo: Mont Allen. | 167 |
| 8.8 | “Acilia sarcophagus.” Rome, National Museum, Palazzo Massimo, inv. 126372. Photo: Mont Allen. | 168 |
| 9.1 | Selection of “apprentice pieces” from Aphrodisias. Photo: Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias, provided by Julie Van Voorhis. | 178 |
| 9.2 | Painted limestone sarcophagus. St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, inv. P-1899.81. Photo: © The State Hermitage Museum; photograph by Vladimir Terebenin, Leonard Kheifets, and Yuri Molodkovets. | 179 |
| 9.3 | Drawing of a sarcophagus relief from Ephesus. After: G. Mendel, <i>Catalogue des sculptures grecques, romaines et byzantines</i> , vol. 1 (Musée Impérial, Constantinople, 1912), p. 79. | 179 |
| 9.4 | Funerary altar. Rome, Vatican Museums, Galleria dei Candelabri, inv. 2671. Photo: Reproduced by kind permission of the Archiv, Institut für Klassische Archäologie und Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich. | 181 |
| 9.5 | Bust after Polyclitus’ “Doryphoros.” Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 4885. Photo: Reproduced by kind permission of the Archiv, Institut für Klassische Archäologie und Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich. | 183 |
| 9.6 | So-called “Orestes and Electra” marble group. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 6006. Photo: Reproduced by kind permission of the Archiv, Institut für Klassische Archäologie und Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich. | 185 |
| 9.7 | “Tabula Iliaca Capitolina.” Rome, Capitoline Museums, Sala delle Colombe inv. 83. Photo: Michael Squire, by kind permission of the Direzione, Musei Capitolini, Rome. | 188 |
| 10.1 | So-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus. Paris, Louvre, inv. MA 975. Photo: Jastrow (2007)/Wikimedia Commons. | 196 |
| 10.2 | General from Tivoli. Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 106513. Photo: Faraglia, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1932.412. | 197 |
| 10.3 | The “Arringatore.” Florence, Museo Archeologico, inv. 3. Photo: Koppermann, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1963.0606. | 198 |
| 10.4 | Ara Pacis Augustae. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York. | 200 |
| 10.5 | Ara Pacis Augustae. Photo: Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, New York. | 200 |
| 10.6 | Belvedere Altar. Rome, Vatican Museum, Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. 1115. Photo: Rossa, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1975.1291, 1975.1292. | 202 |
| 10.7 | Augustus of Prima Porta. Rome, Vatican Museum, Braccio Nuovo n. 14. Photo: Courtesy John Pollini. | 205 |
| 10.8 | Gemma Augustea. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. IXa AS 79. Photo: Andreas Praefcke/Wikimedia Commons. | 207 |
| 10.9 | Jupiter Column, Mainz. Photo: Courtesy Kimberly Cassibry. | 209 |

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| 10.10 | Cancelleria Reliefs A and B. Rome, Vatican Museums, Museo Gregoriano Profano. Photo: Courtesy John Pollini. | 209 |
| 11.1 | Base of the Column of Antoninus Pius. Rome, Vatican Museums, Cortile delle Corazze. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York – ART45685. | 215 |
| 11.2 | Base of the Column of Antoninus Pius. Rome, Vatican Museums, Cortile delle Corazze. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York – ART 22011. | 216 |
| 11.3 | Funerary monument of Lusius Storax. Chieti, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Photo: Hutzl, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1962.1069. | 220 |
| 11.4 | Altar of the vicomagistri. Rome, Capitoline Museum, Centrale Montemartini, inv. 855. Photo: Koppermann, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1960.1472. | 221 |
| 11.5 | Fresco from the shop of Verecundus, Pompeii. Photo: SAP-AFS 80887, su concessione del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei. | 224 |
| 11.6 | Stele of Longidienus. Ravenna, National Museum, inv. 7. Photo: Koppermann, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1962.2149. | 226 |
| 12.1 | Distribution of 1st–3rd century CE honorands. © J. Fejfer. | 235 |
| 12.2 | Late Republican portrait. Osimo, Palazzo Comunale. Photo: Rossa, Neg. DAI-Rom 75.1051 | 239 |
| 12.3 | Mummy portrait of a man. London, British Museum, inv. EA74715. Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum. | 241 |
| 12.4 | Antonine male bust. Teramo, Museo Civico. Deposito della Scuola. Photo: Hutzl, Neg. DAI- Rom 94.1338. | 241 |
| 12.5 | Statue of empress Sabina. Antalya, Museum, inv. A3066 (head) and A3086 (body). Photo: Gregor Borg. | 243 |
| 12.6 | Statue of Plancia Magna. Antalya, Museum, inv. A3459. Photo: Gregor Borg. | 244 |
| 12.7 | Busts on high bust feet of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva displayed on a table. Photo: By permission of Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo – Soprintendenza Speciale per I Beni Archeologici di Roma. | 246 |
| 12.8 | Histogram showing chronological distribution of honorands. © J. Fejfer. | 247 |
| 13.1 | The Four Pompeian Styles. Collage: Katharina Lorenz. (a) Drawing: A. Mau, <i>Zur Geschichte der decorativen Wandmalerei in Pompeji</i> (Berlin, 1882), pl. 2. (b) Drawing: A. Mau, <i>Zur Geschichte der decorativen Wandmalerei in Pompeji</i> (Berlin, 1882), pl. 7b. (c) Drawing: A. Mau <i>Zur Geschichte der decorativen Wandmalerei in Pompeji</i> (Berlin, 1882), pl. 10a. (d) W. Zahn, <i>Die schönsten Ornamente und merkwürdigsten Gemälde aus Pompeji, Herculaneum und Stabiae I</i> (Berlin, 1828), pl. 89. | 254 |
| 13.2 | Pompeii, Casa di Sallustio. Reconstruction © Glenn Gunhouse, Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design, Georgia State University (www.medievalist.net/unityworlds/romanhouse.htm), with kind permission. | 257 |
| 13.3 | Megalographie from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale. Photo: Anagoria/Wikimedia Commons. | 259 |
| 13.4 | Pompeii, Casa del Sacerdus Amandus. Photo: Katharina Lorenz. | 261 |
| 13.5 | Pompeii, Casa della Caccia Antica. Photo: D-DAI-Rom: 1977.0256. | 264 |
| 14.1 | Black-and-white mosaic. Baths of Buticosis, Ostia. Photo: R.J. Ling 96/35. | 270 |
| 14.2 | Black-and-white mosaic, Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli. Photo: R.J. Ling 98/10. | 271 |
| 14.3 | "Rainbow mat" in House of the Hunt, Bulla Regia (Tunisia). Photo: R.J. Ling 107/28. | 272 |
| 14.4 | Mosaic with amphitheater scenes from Smirat (Tunisia). Sousse Museum. Photo: R.J. Ling 103/27. | 274 |

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 14.5 | Head of Oceanus from Baths at Themetra (Tunisia). Sousse Museum. Photo: R.J. Ling 103/2. | 280 |
| 14.6 | Wall mosaic with animal scenes. House of Neptune and Amphitrite, Herculaneum. Photo: R.J. Ling 6/34. | 281 |
| 15.1 | Sarcophagus of M. Aurelius Apellas. Aphrodisias, Museum, inv. 6528/ S474 (chest) and S475 (lid). Photo: Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias (S474 neg. 01/122). | 288 |
| 15.2 | Sarcophagus with the Three Graces. Withington Hall, Chelford (UK). Photo: Archäologisches Institut, Cologne Digital Archaeology Laboratory, Universität zu Köln, FA 1462-09/31563 (www.arachne.uni-koeln.de). | 289 |
| 15.3 | <i>Vita Romana</i> sarcophagus. Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 310683. Photo: By permission of Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo – Soprintendenza Speciale per I Beni Archeologici di Roma. | 290 |
| 15.4 | Sarcophagus. Rome, Museo Capitolino, inv. 725. Photo: Singer, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 67.32. | 291 |
| 15.5 | Sarcophagus Pisa, Camposanto, inv. A3est. Photo: Singer, Neg. D-DAI- Rom 72.268. | 298 |
| 16.1 | Monopodium. Ercolano, Antiquarium, inv. SAP 7678/1500. © Archivio dell'arte/Luciano Pedicini, Neg. D40803. | 305 |
| 16.2 | Ornamental puteal. Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. 173-E. Photo: Neg. DAI-MAD-WIT-R-18-95-13. | 307 |
| 16.3 | Marble candelabra. Tunis, Bardo Museum, inv. C 1208. Photo: Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn, Neg. LVR – Landesmuseum Bonn. | 309 |
| 16.4 | Marble lamp. Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 125843. Photo: K. Anger, Neg. D-DAI-ROM-97.139. | 311 |
| 16.5 | Volute krater. Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico, inv. 6779. © Archivio dell'arte/Luciano Pedicini, Neg. D70317. | 312 |
| 16.6 | Comedy mask. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, inv. Hm 224. Photo: © Skulpturensammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Neg. Sk-Hm-224-Ekta-2007-04. Photograph by Hans-Peter Klut/Elke Estel, Dresden 2007/2008. | 314 |
| 16.7 | Oscillum. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, inv. Hm 321. Photo: © Skulpturensammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Neg. Sk-Hm-321-Ekta-2008-01. Photograph by Hans-Peter Klut/Elke Estel, Dresden 2007/2008. | 315 |
| 17.1 | Two flourite cups. London, British Museum, GR 1971.0419.1 and 2003.12-2.1. Photo: Kenneth Lapatin. | 327 |
| 17.2 | "Cup of the Ptolemies." Agate. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques. Photo: Erich Lessing/ Art Resource. | 328 |
| 17.3 | "Centaur cup." Silver. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques, 56.7. Photo: T. Cracchiola courtesy Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques, Paris. | 331 |
| 17.4 | Hollow gold bust of Septimius Severus. Komotini, Archaeological Museum, inv. 207. Photo: H.R. Goette. | 333 |
| 17.5 | Jasper togatus. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 17.230.54. Photo: Kenneth Lapatin. | 334 |
| 17.6 | Chalcedony bust of Agrippina Minor. London, British Museum, inv. 1907,0415.1 (Gem 3946). Photo: Kenneth Lapatin. | 334 |

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| 17.7 | Ivory foot. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of John Marshall, 1925 (25.78.43). Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, New York. | 335 |
| 17.8 | Fulcrum of a double-headed couch. Bronze, copper, silver. Rome, Museo dei Conservatori, inv. 1074. Photo: Araldo de Luca. | 336 |
| 17.9 | Amber perfume pot. London, British Museum, inv. 1866,0412.3 (Amber 114). Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum. | 337 |
| 17.10 | Necklace. Gold, pearl, emerald. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 113576. Photo: Alfredo Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource. | 338 |
| 17.11 | Mummy portrait of Isidora. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. 81.AP.42. Photo: J. Paul Getty Museum Villa Collection. | 338 |
| 17.12 | Gold-glass portrait. Arezzo, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 14973. Photo: Scala/Art Resource. | 339 |
| 18.1 | Athens, Library of Hadrian. Photo: Edmund Thomas. | 349 |
| 18.2 | Nîmes (Nemausus), “Maison Carrée.” Photo: Danichou/Wikimedia Commons. | 353 |
| 18.3 | Palmyra, Severan arch. Photo: Edmund Thomas. | 354 |
| 18.4 | Baalbek, “Temple of Bacchus,” c. 150–160 CE. Interior view, looking east toward the entrance. Photo: Edmund Thomas. | 357 |
| 18.5 | Panini, Giovanni Paolo, “Interior of the Pantheon in Rome.” Washington, National Gallery of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection. Photo: Hajothu/Wikimedia Commons. | 358 |
| 18.6 | Jerash (Gerasa), Jordan, Nymphaeum. Photo: Edmund Thomas. | 359 |
| 19.1 | House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii, floor plan. Drawing: John R. Clarke. | 371 |
| 19.2 | House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii, atrium. Photo: Giovanni Lattanzi. | 372 |
| 19.3 | Portrait herm of L. Caecilius Felix. Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico, inv. 110663. Photo: Archäologisches Institut, Cologne Digital Archaeology Laboratory, Universität zu Köln, de Fitt73-13-06_13589.jpg (www.arachne.uni-koeln.de). | 373 |
| 19.4 | House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii, tablinum. Reconstruction: D. Baker & M. Blazeby, Department of Digital Humanities, King’s College London. | 374 |
| 19.5 | House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompei, cubiculum g. Reconstruction: D. Baker & M. Blazeby, Department of Digital Humanities, King’s College London. | 375 |
| 19.6 | House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii, Orestes killing Neoptolemos. Photo: Wolfgang Rieger/Wikimedia Commons. | 377 |
| 19.7 | House of the Bound Animals, Thuburbo Majus, overview. Photo: Giraud Patrick/Wikimedia Commons. | 380 |
| 19.8 | House of the Bound Animals, Thuburbo Majus, floor plan. A. Ben Abed (ed.), <i>Corpus des Mosaïques de la Tunisie Vol II Thuburbo Maius</i> (Dumbarton Oaks, 1999) and INAA, Tunis, plan 22. | 381 |
| 19.9 | House of the Protomes, Thuburbo Majus, triclinium mosaic. Tunis, Bardo Museum. Photo: S. Ellis. | 383 |
| 19.10 | Statuette of Ganymede and the Eagle of Zeus from the House of the Greek Charioteers at Carthage. Photo: Pascal Radigue, modified by M00tty/Wikimedia Commons. | 384 |
| 20.1 | Oplontis, view of the large <i>piscina</i> with statues. Photo: DAI, InstNeg.1976 (o.N.). | 393 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 20.2 | Stabiae, Villa San Marco, view of the nymphaeum. Drawing: M. Schützenberger. | 394 |
| 20.3 | Baiae, Claudius' nymphaeum. Drawing: M. Schützenberger. | 395 |
| 20.4 | Sperlonga, reconstruction of the view of the grotto. Drawing: M. Schützenberger. | 396 |
| 20.5 | Herculaneum, Villa of the Papyri, layout showing the distribution of sculptures. Drawing: Richard Neudecker. | 397 |
| 20.6 | Tivoli, Hadrian's Villa, view of sculptures by the Canopus. Drawing: Richard Neudecker. | 401 |
| 21.1 | Acholla, House of the Triumph of Neptune, floor plan. Plan: S. Muth, based on S. Muth, <i>Erleben von Raum—Leben im Raum</i> (Heidelberg, 1998), pl. 48 fig. 2. | 410 |
| 21.2 | Villa of Piazza Armerina, floor plan. Plan: S. Muth. | 413 |
| 21.3 | Geometric mosaic compositions: a) Thysdrus, late second/early third century; b) Silin, third century. Photo: S. Muth. | 414 |
| 21.4 | Villa of Piazza Armerina, reconstruction. Reconstruction: A. Müller, S. Muth, & D. Zombronner. | 415 |
| 21.5 | Villa of Piazza Armerina, reconstruction. Reconstruction: A. Müller, S. Muth, & D. Zombronner. | 416 |
| 21.6 | Mosaic of Dominus Julius at Carthage. Tunis, Bardo Museum. Photo: S. Muth. | 420 |
| 21.7 | Achilles mosaic from the villa of Pedrosa de la Vega. Photo: S. Muth. | 422 |
| 21.8 | Meleager and Atalanta mosaic from the villa of Cardeñajimeno. Photo: S. Muth. | 422 |
| 22.1 | Rome, Via Appia, Mausoleum X. After: G. Mancini, <i>Notizie degli Scavi</i> 1923, pl. 13.2. | 432 |
| 22.2 | Rome, Via Aurelia, Columbarium Doria Pamphili. Photo: Phaedra – University of Vienna. | 435 |
| 22.3 | Isola Sacra. Photo: © Gregor Borg. | 436 |
| 22.4 | Isola Sacra Tomb 16. Photo: © Gregor Borg. | 436 |
| 22.5 | Rome, Via Flaminia, Tomb of the Nasonii. After: G.P. Bellori & P. Santi Bartoli, <i>Le Pitture Antiche Del Sepolcro De Nasonii Nella Via Flaminia</i> (Bussotti, Rome, 1680), pl. 21. | 437 |
| 22.6 | Rome, Via Flaminia, Tomb of the Nasonii. After: G.P. Bellori & P. Santi Bartoli, <i>Le Pitture Antiche Del Sepolcro De Nasonii Nella Via Flaminia</i> (Bussotti, Rome, 1680), pl. 12. | 438 |
| 22.7 | Rome, Via Ostiensis, Sepolcreto Ostiense. Photo: Barbara E. Borg. | 438 |
| 22.8 | Rome, Via Portuensis, Tomb C. Photo: By permission of Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma. © Photo: Francisca Feraudi-Gruénais. | 442 |
| 22.9 | Rome, Via Appia, Mausoleum Y. After: G. Mancini, <i>Notizie degli Scavi</i> (Rome, 1923), pl. 15.1. | 444 |
| 22.10 | Rome, Via Latina, Columbarium of Vigna Codini II. Photo: Phaedra – University of Vienna. | 446 |
| 22.11 | Rome, Via Portuensis, fossa mosaic, inv. MC 1235/S. Centrale Montemartini. Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini. | 446 |
| 23.1 | Area I of the St. Callixtus Catacomb. After: P. Styger, <i>Die Römischen Katakomben</i> (Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin, 1933), p. 36, fig. 10. | 456 |

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| 23.2 | Ceiling image from Cubiculum Y in Lucina. After: J. Wilpert, <i>Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms</i> (Herder, Freiburg, 1903), pl. 25. | 458 |
| 23.3 | Chapel of the Sacrament A3, wall spool. After G.B. De Rossi, <i>La Roma sotterranea cristiana</i> , vol. 2 (Cromo-Lit. Pontificia, Roma, 1867), pl. next to D. | 459 |
| 23.4 | Locus wall in the Catacomb of Jordanians. After: J. Wilpert, <i>Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms</i> (Herder, Freiburg, 1903), pl. 212. | 463 |
| 23.5 | Arcosolium of Veneranda in the Catacomb of Domitilla. After: J. Wilpert, <i>Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms</i> (Herder, Freiburg, 1903), pl. 213. | 465 |
| 23.6 | Ceiling painting in the Catacomb of Sts. Peter and Marcellinus. After: J. Wilpert, <i>Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms</i> (Herder, Freiburg, 1903), pl. 252. | 466 |
| 24.1 | Cornice of main temple at Heliopolis-Baalbek. Photo: R.R.R. Smith. | 474 |
| 24.2 | Relief from Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. Photo: Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias. | 477 |
| 24.3 | Portrait of Titus. Selcuk Museum, inv. 1/76/92. Photo: R.R.R. Smith. | 478 |
| 24.4 | Temple of Artemis at Sardis. Photo: R.R.R. Smith. | 479 |
| 24.5 | Tyche from Prusias. Istanbul Archaeological Museum inv. 4410. Photo: Ahmed Ertug with kind permission. | 480 |
| 24.6 | Bouleuterion at Aphrodisias. Photo: R.R.R. Smith. | 483 |
| 24.7 | Himation bust of Herodes Atticus. Paris, Louvre, inv. Ma 1164. Photo: Alphanion/Wikimedia Commons. | 485 |
| 24.8 | Attic sarcophagus. Thessaloniki Archaeological Museum inv. 1246. Photo: R.R.R. Smith. | 487 |
| 24.9 | Celsus Library at Ephesos. After: W. Wilberg, M. Theuer, F. Eichler, & J. Keil, <i>Die Bibliothek</i> (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vienna, 1953), pl. 1. | 488 |
| 24.10 | Sarcophagus. Palmyra Museum inv. 2677B/8983. Photo: R.R.R. Smith. | 489 |
| 25.1 | Altar. Djemila, <i>in situ</i> . Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 498 |
| 25.2 | Votive relief in honor of Saturn. Timgad, Museum. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 499 |
| 25.3 | African red slip head vase. Cologne, Römisch-Germanisches Museum. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 500 |
| 25.4 | La Chebba, mosaic of Neptune. Tunis, Bardo Museum. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 501 |
| 25.5 | Marble head of a young woman. Seville, Museo Arqueológico Provincial. Photo: Neg. D-DAI-MAD-WIT-R-027-83-02. | 504 |
| 25.6 | Peristyle mosaic, villa, Marbella. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 506 |
| 25.7 | Oceanus mosaic, villa, Carranque. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 508 |
| 25.8 | Statue of Mercury, Lezoux. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée d'Archéologie Nationale. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 511 |
| 25.9 | Naiz-aux-Forges (Meuse), three-faced god. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée d'Archéologie Nationale. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 512 |
| 25.10 | Hausen an der Zaber, Jupiter column (modern recreation in Xanten). Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 513 |
| 25.11 | Neumagen, funerary relief. Trier, Römisches Landesmuseum. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 514 |
| 25.12 | Ceiling fresco. Trier, Römisches Landesmuseum. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 518 |
| 25.13 | Dionysus mosaic. Cologne, Römisch-Germanisches Museum. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 519 |

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| 25.14 | Bath, pedimental sculpture. Bath, Roman Baths Museum. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 521 |
| 25.15 | Tombstone of Insus. Lancaster, City Museum. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 522 |
| 25.16 | Mosaic of Europa and the bull, villa, Lullingstone. Photo: R.J.A. Wilson. | 524 |
| 26.1 | Plan of the Casa del Bracciale d'Oro (VI.17.2), Pompeii. Drawing: J. Willmott. | 534 |
| 26.2 | Peristyle garden in the Casa dei Vettii (VI. 15.1), Pompeii. Photo: M. Carroll. | 535 |
| 26.3 | North park of the Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis. Photo: M. Carroll. | 536 |
| 26.4 | Garden painting, Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis. Photo: M. Carroll. | 537 |
| 26.5 | Garden painting in the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta. Photo: M. Carroll. | 539 |
| 26.6 | Garden painting, Casa del Bracciale D'Oro (VI.17.2), Pompeii. Photo: Samuel Magal, Sites & Photos Ltd./The Bridgeman Art Library. | 540 |
| 26.7 | Peristyle garden, House of Venus Marina (II.3.3), Pompeii. Photo: M. Carroll. | 541 |
| 26.8 | Painting in a corridor, Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis. Photo: M. Carroll. | 542 |
| 26.9 | Wall painting, Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis. Photo: M. Carroll. | 543 |
| 26.10 | Wall paintings from Pompeii. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples. Photo: Archivio dell'Arte, Luciano Pedicini. | 544 |
| 27.1 | Mosaic signed by Dioscurides. Naples, Museo Archeologico inv. 9985. Photo: Soprintendenza per i beni archeologici di Napoli e Pompei; courtesy of R. Ling. | 554 |
| 27.2 | Reconstruction of the triclinium mosaic from the House of Menander, Mytilene. Photo: By permission of E. Csapo and <i>Antike Kunst</i> . | 555 |
| 27.3 | Drawing of vase with circus and gladiatorial scenes. After: <i>RIB</i> 2419.18 (D. B. Harden) by permission of the Haverfield Trustees. | 557 |
| 27.4 | Alexander Helix mosaic, Ostia. Photo: Archivio Fotografico della Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma e Ostia. | 558 |
| 27.5 | Reliefs from the Tomb of Lusius Storax. Chieti, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Photo: Hützel, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 62.1068. | 560 |
| 27.6 | Relief showing the Judgment of Paris, Sabratha. Photo: Sichtermann, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 58.458. | 562 |
| 27.7 | Relief from the Tomb of Gutta Calpurnianus, Rome. Musei Capitolini, Museo Nuovo Capitolino, inv. 2244. Photo: Fototeca Unione, American Academy in Rome FU 1151. | 564 |
| 28.1 | Wall painting from Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 9529. Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons. | 572 |
| 28.2 | Sarcophagus with Glaucus and Medea. Rome, Museo Museo Nazionale Romano. Photo: DAI Rom 63.545. | 575 |
| 28.3 | Blinding of Polyphemus. Sperlonga, Museo Archeologico. Photo: F. de Angelis. | 576 |
| 28.4 | Punishment of Ixion, wall painting. Pompeii, House of the Vettii. Photo: Columbia University. | 577 |
| 28.5 | Relief with Aeneas fleeing from Troy, from the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias. Aphrodisias, Museum. Photo: F. de Angelis. | 579 |
| 29.1 | Robert Adam, The Etruscan Dressing Room, Osterley Park House, Middlesex. Photo: ©NTPL/Bill Batten. | 589 |
| 29.2 | Lawrence Alma-Tadema, <i>The Vintage Festival</i> , oil on canvas (1870: Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg). bpk Berlin/Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle. Photo: Elke Walford. | 592 |

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 29.3 | <i>Fellini, Satyricon</i> (Federico Fellini, Italy/France 1969, 02:06:12). | 594 |
| 29.4 | Mark Rothko, <i>Black on Maroon</i> , mixed media on canvas (1959: Tate Modern). Photo: © Tate, London. © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko ARS, New York and DACS, London. | 596 |
| 30.1 | London, St. Paul's Cathedral, 1675–1711. Photo: St. Altekamp. | 605 |
| 30.2 | St. Petersburg, Russian Museum (Mikhailovsky Palace), 1819–1825. Photo: St. Altekamp. | 607 |
| 30.3 | Rome, EUR, Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, 1938–1943. Photo: St. Altekamp. | 611 |
| 30.4 | Mérida, Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, 1981–1986. Photo: St. Altekamp. | 614 |

Introduction

Barbara E. Borg

A Companion to Roman Art: this sounds like a pretty straightforward title—but is it? We all know what Roman “art” is—after all, the Augustus statue from Prima Porta (Figure 10.7) and the Column of Trajan (Figure 2.1) are widely known far beyond the academic realm. Or do we? We all have immediate associations with the notion of “Roman” art (as opposed, for instance, to “Greek” art). But are we sure what exactly is Roman about it? And while “companions” are springing up like mushrooms around us; and there will be few people who have never read or consulted one; and we surely have certain expectations when we read the word in a book title—is there an agreement on what they are, or should be like? At a second glance, none of these terms is as obvious as it may initially appear.

Roman?

The difficulty in determining what “Roman” may mean, arguably a definition that shifts with time, has long been discussed. That the city of Rome plays a key part is obvious, but almost everything beyond this point is disputed. Conventionally the term is used for phenomena pertaining to the imperial period, and within the borders of the Roman Empire – that is, primarily in chronological terms, even if a spatial notion comes into play, as the chronological usage would not make sense when speaking about second-century CE China, for instance. However, clearly not everything that pertains to this period and the regions of Roman influence is shaped by the cultural tradition of Rome, and even when it is, it is likely to merge metropolitan inspiration with the local. On the other hand, from its very beginnings Rome itself had been shaped by the various cultures with which it came into contact, and from the late republic onwards it was a multicultural melting pot with people from all parts of the empire and beyond settling in the city.

This raises the question of what it really is that makes certain features Roman, and whether it is the same for us as it was for the ancients. We may identify certain hairstyles or building types as Roman, but how do we know that they did not merely express a *habitus* or lifestyle that had been adopted across the Empire without necessarily being an emphatic marker of Romanness? Do Europeans always think of the United States when they drink Coca-Cola?

Evidence suggests that at least the local elites and aspiring parts of the citizenry of the Roman Empire adhered to a remarkable extent to a common system of shared values, aspirations, and lifestyles; and that these also shaped the material and visual culture across the Empire. Yet disregarding whether the individuals concerned considered these as specifically Roman—as opposed to local—the degree and level of detail to which they shared in such habits and their material expressions varied widely. For example, the Roman timocratic system demanded a considerable degree of self-promotion, and the use of honorific statue monuments, either in public or in more private contexts such as houses, villas, and tombs, was one means of achieving that aim. Nevertheless, the extent to which this habit was adopted, and the precise details of what locals regarded as worth depicting in these monuments, as well as the degree to which the monuments conveyed an explicitly Roman image, varied greatly across the Empire.

There is a chronological dimension linked to the geographical one as well. For the archaic period, the era of the kings, “Roman” would probably largely refer to the art and culture of the emerging city of Rome—although one might question how “Roman” Roman art was at a time when Greek and Etruscan art loomed large in the city. Most would extend the term step by step to include also the art of those regions that came under Roman dominion and finally formed the Roman Empire. But at what point, then, should we start calling Roman the art from, say, Campania? At the other end of the chronological spectrum, it is quite strange, and somewhat arbitrary, that the periods from Constantine onwards are very rarely included in what is generally called Roman culture. To be sure, Rome and its Empire experienced major changes at the time, but there was no cultural caesura, and even Christianity not only drew on Roman tradition in all sorts of ways, but also took quite some time fully to dominate and shape the culture of the Roman Empire and its successors.

I am not claiming to have resolved any of these issues with the present volume, and any attempt at trying to do so would probably be doomed to fail. I have therefore adopted an approach whereby the core of the volume focuses, in a rather traditional way and probably along the lines of most readers’ expectations, on the imperial period before Constantine, and to some degree on the city of Rome and Italy, but in doing so a conscious attempt was made to blur any boundaries that this traditional focus might create. I have thus included dedicated chapters on the Republican period (Chapter 5, by Massimiliano Papini, but see also Rachel Kousser in Chapter 6 and Peter J. Holliday in Chapter 10); on the assimilation of Greek art within the Roman empire (Chapter 6, by Rachel Kousser, but see also Christopher H. Hallett in Chapter 1); and on late antiquity (Chapter 7, by Alessandra Bravi; Chapter 21, by Susanne Muth; and Chapter 23, by Norbert Zimmermann), as well as on Roman art in the provinces (Chapter 24 on the Greek East, by Roland R.R. Smith; and Chapter 25 on the Latin West, by Roger J.A. Wilson), with many other authors including the provinces in their discussions.

Art?

The term “art” is at least as contested and elusive. Conventionally, and at least when we disregard modern art, it is applied to everything that is nice to look at and required some advanced skills to be produced. Yet what exactly does it take to deny an object the title of “art”? How much skill is needed to make an object acceptable as “art”? How beautiful does it need to be? And according to whose judgment? The term also carries the baggage of the modern concept of “art as such,” of art as the product of the genius artist who creates a piece of art out of his (rarely her) own mind and spirit, merely for contemplation, and without regard for the object’s purpose or function. If we subscribe to this definition, hardly anything from the classical world can be regarded as art, since the idea of art as a category of its own that is detached from aspects of usefulness and function is a modern one (Abrams 1981 and 1985). In Greco-Roman