

LISA TRENTIN

The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art



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Lisa Trentin

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Preface

This book began life as a doctoral thesis written at the University of Nottingham between 2003 and 2007. The seeds for this project, however, were planted years earlier as an undergraduate student in Classical Archaeology at Wilfrid Laurier University. A senior seminar in 'Hellenistic Art and Architecture' introduced me to the 'other' side of the Classical ideal and my views on ancient art and the body beautiful were forever changed. What followed were several years of postgraduate work exploring representations of abnormality in the ancient Greco-Roman world: an MA dissertation at the University of Reading on 'Hermaphrodites in Roman Society and Sculpture' and a PhD thesis at the University of Nottingham on 'What's in a Hump? Re-presenting Deformity in Greco-Roman Art'. The first of these placed itself firmly within the wide and well-established gamut of research exploring the body of the hermaphrodite; the latter placed itself proudly at the forefront of new research exploring the body of the hunchback.

The figure of the hunchback has received relatively little scholarly attention, resulting in a significant gap in this field of research. The wealth of surviving evidence for the hunchback in both the literary and visual records is in itself sufficient motivation for further inquiry; however, no detailed study has yet been undertaken. My research seeks to put the figure of the hunchback back on the map, so to speak, by giving the hunchback the attention that it has been hitherto denied in the academy at large. My hope for this book extends beyond this: to provide a source of reference for future scholarly investigation that will continue to advance our knowledge of the hunchback, and more broadly, representations of the deformed and disabled Other in Classical antiquity.

Acknowledgements

This project is the result of years of research which formally began during my doctorate; I am grateful to the many people who helped see it to completion. Above all, I owe the greatest debt to my doctoral supervisor, Caroline Vout, who has been a true friend and mentor throughout my academic career. I thank too my PhD examiners, Catharine Edwards and Katarina Lorenz, for their recommendations in developing this project for publication. Although I have worked closely from the structure of my doctorate, all of the contents have been revisited and rewritten: two chapters of that original work have appeared in print elsewhere (Trentin 2009, 2011) and a new chapter has been added.

While turning this from thesis to book I worked in the Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies at my alma mater, Wilfrid Laurier University. Special thanks must go to Judith Fletcher, who has been endlessly generous with her time, intellect and encouragement over the past decade, first as my professor and then as my colleague. I am also grateful to have received generous funding from the Faculty of Arts to support the costs of reproducing the photographs in this book.

I wish also to thank Deborah Blake, Charlotte Loveridge, Anna MacDiarmid, Dhara Patel and Alice Reid, the Classics editorial team, past and present, at Bloomsbury Academic for their guidance and patience throughout, and the reviewers of my manuscript, Barbara Kellum and Jane Masségia, for their generous feedback and judicious commentary. To Duncan Hill, who read multiple drafts of this work with great care and offered valuable suggestions for its improvement, and who, moreover, was always close by with words of comfort and cheer, you are truly a patient and treasured friend – thank you!

Last, but by no means least, I extend heartfelt thanks to my family and friends whose support and encouragement have known no bounds. Without you all, none of this would have been worthwhile.

**Lisa Trentin
Toronto, 2014**

Abbreviations

Ancient texts are cited in the notes according to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (fourth edition). All translations are from the Loeb Classical Library unless otherwise indicated. Modern sources repeatedly referenced in the chapters that follow are here listed. All other references are cited in full in the bibliography.

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|----------------------------------|--|
| Bartman, <i>Miniature</i> | Bartman, E. (1992), <i>Ancient Sculptural Copies in Miniature</i> , Leiden: Brill. |
| Dasen, <i>Dwarfs</i> | Dasen, V. (1993), <i>Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece</i> , Oxford: Clarendon Press. |
| Garland, <i>Beholder</i> | Garland, R. (1995, 2010), <i>The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World</i> , London: Bristol Classical Press. |
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| Masségliia, <i>Body Language</i> | Masségliia, J. (2015), <i>Body Language in Hellenistic Art and Society</i> , Oxford: Oxford University Press. |
| Richter, <i>Grotesques</i> | Richter, G. M. A. (1913), 'Grotesques and the Mime', <i>American Journal of Archaeology</i> 17: 149–56. |

Stevenson,
Pathological Grotesque

Stevenson, W. E. (1975), 'The Pathological Grotesque Representations in Greek and Roman Art', PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania.

Wace, *Grotesques*

Wace, A. J. B. (1903–04), 'Grotesques and the Evil Eye', *Annual of the British School at Athens*, 10: 103–14.

‘Londres possède, au British Museum, un ivoire très probablement d’origine grecque . . . et qui nous offre un bel exemple de rachitisme.’

Paul Richer, *L’Art et la Médecine* (Paris, 1902), p. 193

‘The hunchback is crouching with his right leg bent under him and his right arm, of which the hand is lost, hanging loosely by his side. His left arm is bent at the elbow and rests on his left knee. The figure is thin and remarkably pigeon-breasted. The collar-bone also is prominent. The head is sunk into the shoulders and leans over towards the left shoulder, which is noticeably lower than the right. The hair is cut very short, the ears are large, the nose aquiline, and great prominence is given to the bone structure above the eyes. In every detail the artist shows an unsparing realism and the most minute observation of an abnormal.’

A. H. S. Yeames, ‘An ivory statuette’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 4 (1907), p. 279

‘The most important representation of Pott’s disease is the beautifully rendered hunchback in the British Museum . . .’

Stevenson, *Pathological Grotesque* (1975), p. 186, cat. no. 145

‘We thus have the touchingly realistic figure of a half-nude and weary hunchback slave, apparently found in Italy, now in the British Museum . . .’

R. D. Barnett, *Ancient Ivories in the Middle East* (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, 1982), p. 65

‘This skilful ivory carving shows the sad and huddled figure of a slave. He shows signs of dwarfism and a hunch-back, which may be symptoms of Pott’s disease. His head drops, and his facial expression is melancholy.

This figure is clearly intended to evoke a sympathetic reaction in the viewer. It is a typical example of the way in which Hellenistic art moved away from idealised representation, and took an interest in the characterization of the individual. The attempt to show personal experience and emotion was applied in both larger-scale sculpture, and in small figures such as this.’

‘Ivory figure of a hunchback’, British Museum website, 2014



Ivory statuette of a hunchback (cat. no. 40)

London, British Museum. Townley Collection, 1814.7-4.237.

Hellenistic, c. first century BCE.

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Introduction

This is a book about *looking* at the Other in Hellenistic and Roman art. More specifically, it is a book about looking at the deformed, and to a lesser extent, the disabled Other using the hunchback as linchpin. But why the hunchback? And why the emphasis on looking?

Corporeal deformity and physical disability has become a topical theme of study, in both the ancient and modern worlds. Aiming to reshape our understanding of culture and identity beyond the 'able' (and by association, the beautiful) body, there have emerged important and ground-breaking works on the history of disability, combined with multiple studies on the representation and reception of deformed and disabled bodies.¹ The figure of the hunchback, however, has, heretofore, received relatively little scholarly attention, resulting in a significant gap in this field of research. This book works towards remedying that.

At the core of this book is a catalogue: a comprehensive collection of hunchback representations, categorized according to formal features, and comprising pieces of different material, date, and diverse provenance, here put together for the first time.² The representations in the catalogue form the building blocks for this study; this is where looking becomes critical. To date, scholars have largely *overlooked* representations of the hunchback; they have been grouped together and examined in association with other representations of physical deformity (e.g. dwarfs), lacking detailed analysis of the distinct iconography that marks the hunchback as unique. This has resulted in a limited understanding of the varied corpus of Other, and the hunchback in particular. Employing detailed visual analysis of this select group of representations, I focus on the implications of viewing the iconography of the hunchback within the broader context of ancient art and its reception. The focus is not solely on the representations themselves or their meanings: who made them, for whom and why, but the ways in which viewers interact with these representations based on sensory experience, especially sight and touch, so as to understand how viewer engagement contributed to function and meaning. Likewise, a

viewer's 'ability' combined with factors such as gender, age, race, ethnicity and social status inevitably affected the reception of these representations; it is these multiple and diverse viewing perspectives that will be examined in the pages that follow. Concomitant with this will be the application of current theory in disability studies to (re)examine the socio-cultural significance of these representations, and, moreover, whenever applicable, attitudes toward the 'real-life' hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman antiquity.

Deformity and disability in contemporary scholarship

This book is the first to examine representations of the hunchback on a rigorous scholarly level; it feeds into a wider, albeit still growing, field addressing the broad topic of corporeal deformity and physical disability in the ancient world. As the subject is still relatively new, it is necessary to trace the work that has been done, and how this present inquiry aims to contribute to the growing body of scholarship.

It was in the early 1990s that the subject of disability in the ancient Greco-Roman world began to arouse the attention of the international academic community, a result, at least in part, of the socio-political climate of the time: the recognition of the disability rights movement that swept over the UK and USA. Recognizing a vast, but relatively un(der)explored corpus of evidence, scholars from diverse backgrounds and disciplines in the arts and sciences have sought to integrate the deformed and disabled body back into our understanding of ancient society and culture, art and representation. This has resulted in a surge in scholarship in recent years.

The first book-length introduction to the topic was Robert Garland's seminal work, *The Eye of the Beholder. Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World*, which examines how society viewed the deformed and disabled, along with their legal, social and economic status. First published in 1995, a second edition appeared in 2010 with a supplementary bibliography outlining developments in the field. Garland's work spurred a number of subsequent studies: Nicholas Vlahogiannis's *Representations of Disability in the Ancient World* (1998) and his chapters on 'Disabling bodies' in the edited volume by D. Montserrat, *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies in the Human Body*