

The Profiles of Caesar's Heads given by Tusculum and Pantelleria Marbles

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Abstract: Here we want to show a comparison of the profiles of Julius Caesar's head, as portrayed in Tusculum and in Pantelleria marbles. These profiles are in good agreement and are in good agreement to that given in a coin of 44 BC, struck one month before Caesar's assassination.

Keywords: Portraits of Julius Caesar, Tusculum head, Pantelleria head, Image processing, Edge detection, GIMP.

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As told by Flemming S. Johansen in [1], the Tusculum portrait is one of the two main types of Julius Caesar's portraits, alongside the Chiaramonti bust. The Tusculum head is dated to 50–40 BC and today is housed in the permanent collection of the Museo d'Antichità in Turin, Italy. The Tusculum head is also known as the "Tusculum bust", however the term "bust" is not properly used because we have only the head, whereas a bust is a sculpture of a person's head, shoulders, and chest.

The Caesar's head was found by Lucien Bonaparte in Tusculum. With some other items of Bonaparte's collection, the bust passed to the House of Savoy and was taken to the Castle of Agliè. A century and a half later, in 1940, archaeologist Maurizio Borda, comparing the profile with some coins, recognized that Caesar was portrayed in it [1,2].

Borda considered the Tusculum portrait an original from Caesar's last years, but, according to Johansen, it is a copy after a bronze original made shortly before or after the death of Caesar (let me note that I am not able to explain how Johansen concluded the existence of a bronze statue). The scholar noted also that it is possible that the Tusculum bust was made after the death of Caesar.

In [1], Johansen tells that the Tusculum portrait type exists in three other copies which we can find at Woburn Abbey, England, in Florence and in Rome. However, in [3], Frank J. Scott tells about the Woburn Abbey bust the following. "A life-size bust, said to resemble one of the busts formerly in the Roman gallery of the Louvre, now withdrawn to the "Magasins"! Bernoulli pronounces it modern." So, it is better to consider the Tusculum bust with Florence and Rome busts, and use, instead of the Woburn Abbey bust, the recently discovered Pantelleria bust, dated from the period between the reigns of Tiberius and Claudius [4,5], that is, from the first half of the first century AD.

It was in 2003 that this perfect face of Julius Caesar had been found in the Italian island of Pantelleria [6]. Sebastiano Tusa, Thomas Schaefer (Tubingen University) and Massimo Osanna (Università della Basilicata) discovered the Caesar's head with other two marble heads of Titus and Agrippina. The perfectly preserved white marble bust found in Pantelleria is putting Caesar in a new light, according to these archaeologists, because this portrait is considered as more pristine than the other contemporary marble busts of Caesar known to exist [6].

Of this marble head, of the Tusculum head and of their comparison to other busts, we discussed in [7-11]. In particular, in [11], we have discussed the profile of the Pantelleria head compared to that of a coin of 44 BC, struck in the occasion of the Lupercalia, one month before Caesar's assassination [12] (about Lupercalia, see Refs. 13 and 14). The comparison shows a remarkable agreement. Here, we want to stress another remarkable agreement, that between the profiles of Tusculum and Pantelleria heads.

For the comparison, we use the pictures in the Figure 1. On the left, the Tusculum bust and, on the right, the Pantelleria bust.



Figure 1. Profiles of Tusculum and Pantelleria (Images are used here just for scientific and cultural purposes). From the left: right side, front view, left side of the Tusculum bust. Left side of the Pantelleria bust.

About the Tusculum bust, we have to tell that the head is not symmetric. The reason is well explained by Francesco Carotta in his discussion on the posture of the head [2]. According to Carotta, in origin the head was not in the vertical position as we see it today. Some anomalies displayed by the head are due to its artistic rendering, required in the case that it had to be seen from below. After his analysis, Carotta concluded that the Tusculum head was a part of a statue and that, on this statue, the head had not a vertical position for sure [2]. This is also clear from the different position of the ears in the Figure 1: the head of Tusculum was placed with a direction inclined towards the right shoulder. The artist that made the Pantelleria head was well aware of such a rendering of the Tusculum head (certainly he had seen it or even the bronze original). As a consequence, probably for making a Caesar's bust, the artist made the Pantelleria head with a more vertical posture [2]. However, also in this case, the posture is not perfectly vertical. To compare the portraits of Tusculum and Pantelleria, and to compare them to a coin, we use the left side of the faces because it seems more conveniently rendered. It is true that, normally, slight differences exist between the sides of a head, but, since the left part of these heads is that which is having a posture closer to that of the coins, we will use it even if the coins are supposed to show the right side of the head. Let us note also the following: if we see in a coin a head turned to the right, this does not necessarily mean that we are looking at the right side of the portrayed person. In the case of a Buca Denarius for instance, it was the left side of the head to be portrayed, but reproduced after a mirror reflection to turn it to the right [15]. Therefore, to compare the profiles in the Figure 1, and for a further comparison to coins, I turn them all in the same direction. I use the filter of GIMP for an edge detection too. The result is given in the Figure 2.

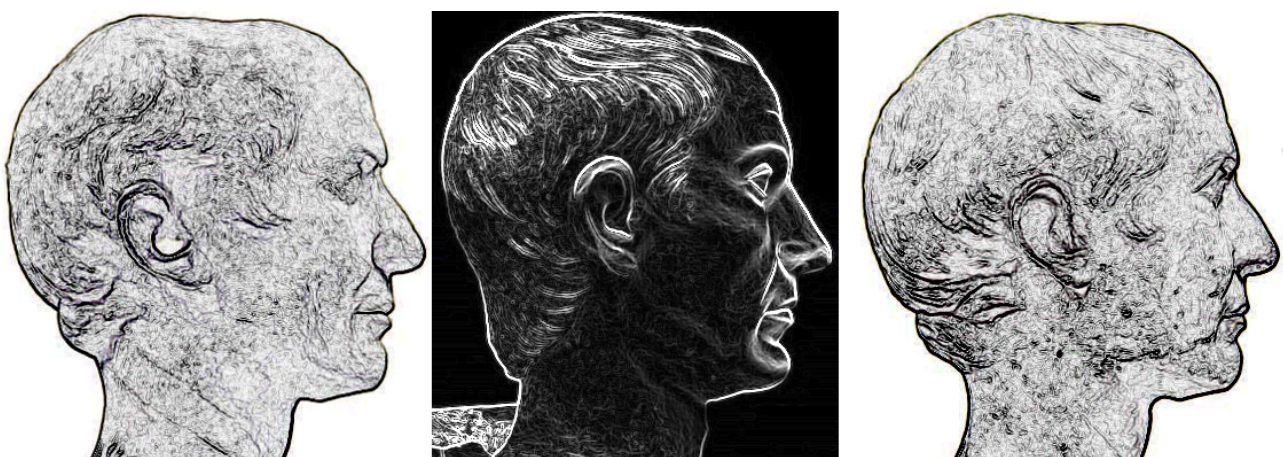


Figure 2. From the left: profiles of Tusculum (right side), Pantelleria (left side), and Tusculum (left side). The images are given after an edge detection filtering with GIMP.

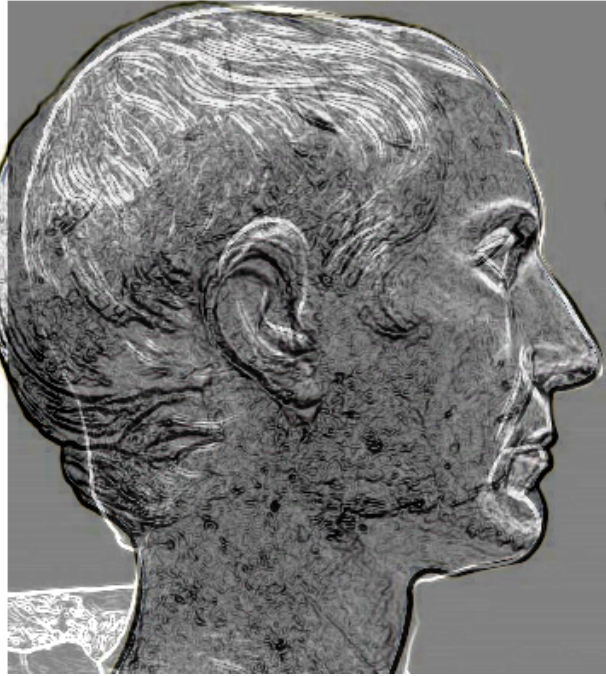


Figure 3. The edges of the profiles superimposed (left side of both heads). The Pantelleria bust is given in white and the Tusculum bust in black.

From the Figure 3, where we have used the left side of both heads, we can see that we have a quite good agreement between the profiles. Even the position of the ear is rather close.

As previously told, we have shown in [11] that the Pantelleria bust is in strong agreement with a coin struck in 44 BC, before the Caesar’s assassination [12]. Here a figure from [11] is given for reader’s convenience.

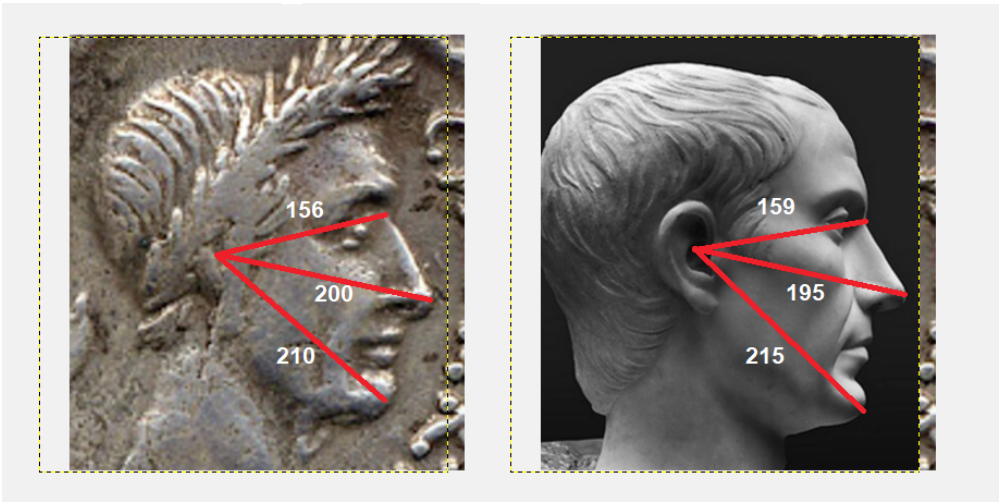


Figure 4: Distances are given by the number of pixels between the end points (Images of coin and bust are used here just for scientific and cultural purposes).

If we use the Figure 4 to make some measurements, we find that differences are very small, less than 3%. The posterior part of the head is different, but this is due to the fact that a crescent was inserted between the frame of the coin and the wreathed head.

Since from the Figure 3 we can see the profiles of Tusculum and Pantelleria heads almost coincident, let us investigate and compare the profile of the Tusculum bust and of the coin of Lupercalia too. The result is given in the Figure 5.



Figure 5: On the left, the coin of 44 BC, struck one month before Caesar's assassination. On the right, the profile of the Tusculum bust. In the middle the two images mixed. Again the agreement is remarkably good.



Figure 6: In blue, the profile of the coin and in red the profile of the statue. The only difference is in the lower part of the nose. Please note that ears are coincident.

From the Figures 5 and 6, we can tell that the agreement is remarkably good. Only the lower part of the nose is slightly different. Please note also that the ears are almost coincident.

We could use for comparison other coins too, but this is beyond the aim of the paper, which is that of the analysis of Tusculum and Pantelleria profiles. The most important result of this work is that the profiles of the two marble portraits are close to that depicted in a coin struck when Caesar was alive, in occasion of the Lupercalia of 44 BC.

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