

The Late Antique Image of Menander

Sarah E. Bassett

If a life be delayed till interest and envy are at an end, we may hope for impartiality, but must expect little intelligence; for the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory, and are rarely transmitted by tradition. We know how few can portray a living acquaintance, except by his most prominent and observable particularities, and the grosser features of his mind; and it may be easily imagined how much of this little knowledge may be lost in imparting it, and how soon a succession of copies will lose all resemblance of the original.

Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* no. 60 (October 13, 1750)

IN THE LONG HISTORY of the Greco-Roman portrait tradition, no image better demonstrates the acuity of Samuel Johnson's observation than the likeness of the Athenian comic poet Menander (342/1–ca. 291 B.C.).¹ Created originally in the third century B.C., the portrait went on to a long life in the Roman period where it was sculptured for and displayed in settings public and private as late as the fifth century A.D. From first to last the portrait maintained a consistent typology, or established set of facial features, preserving as it did Menander's "most prominent and observable particularities." In the fourth century A.D., however, the introduction of technical and formal changes to the portrait's physical production so transformed those "particularities" as to give the poet a new look, one that might be said from a Johnsonian point of view to have lost "all resemblance of the original." This loss of resemblance

¹ The following will be cited by author's name:

O. Palagia, "A New Interpretation of Menander's Image by Kephisodotos II and Timarchos," *ASAtene* 83 (2005) 287–296

G. M. A. Richter, *Portraits of the Greeks* (London 1965)

G. M. A. Richter and R. R. R. Smith, *Portraits of the Greeks* (Ithaca 1984)

R. R. R. Smith, "Late Roman Philosopher Portraits from Aphrodisias," *JRS* 80 (1990) 127–155

P. Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates. The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity* (transl. A. Shapiro, Berkeley 1995)

and the emergence of a new image is the subject of this essay, which considers how the manipulation of the visual aspects of sculptural form, elements such as compositional structure, proportion, and the treatment of surface texture, created a change in style that contributed to a distinctly late-antique definition of the character of Menander.

Menander is among the best represented of all Greek men of letters in the Hellenistic-Roman portrait repertoire. Over 70 portraits survive as herms, busts, and medallions, with dates ranging from the first century B.C. to the fifth A.D. In each of these representations, Menander appears as a clean-shaven, strong-jawed man of indeterminate middle age. Artfully tousled hair frames a slim face characterized by a high, slightly creased brow, deeply set eyes above an aquiline nose, pronounced cheekbones, and a full mouth. When dress appears it is the chiton and the himation (*fig. 1*).² The isolated-head type that later came to be preferred is thought to derive from an original full-body depiction by Praxiteles' sons, Kephisodotos the Younger and Timarchos, that was set up in Athens' theater of Dionysos around the time of the poet's death ca. 290 B.C., under the terms of a commission that are not known. That image, which has been reconstructed by Klaus Fittschen,³ shows Menander seated in a high-backed chair, sporting the chiton and the himation (*fig. 2*). The pose is upright but relaxed, as indicated by the turn of the torso to the right, the curved shoulders, and what would have been the casual placement of the now missing legs with one foot forward and one back between the legs of the chair. The arms also are missing, but the turn of the shoulder and the angles at which the remains of the limbs run along the side of the upper torso suggest that the right hand would have rested casually in the poet's lap while the left hung loosely by his side.

² For basic documentation of the Menander portrait and discussion of the identification and characteristics of its typology see Richter 224–236, figs. 1514–1643, and Richter/Smith 159–164, figs. 121–126.

³ K. Fittschen, "Zur Rekonstruktion griechischer Dichterstatuen 1. Teil: Die Statue des Menander," *AthMitt* 106 (1991) 243–279, pl. 52–78.

The Menander portrait is interesting for two reasons: quantity and longevity. Nearly 100 portrait types of literati known mostly through Roman copies were created between the fifth and third centuries B.C. This group includes such undisputed greats as Plato and Aristotle, yet none of these images comes even remotely close to Menander in terms of surviving numbers. Homer,⁴ Socrates,⁵ and Demosthenes⁶ are the best represented at around 50 portraits each, while images of Epicurus,⁷ Hermarchus,⁸ Sophocles,⁹ and the Pseudo-Seneca/Hesiod¹⁰ represent the next largest group with numbers in the 30s. In other words, there are at least twice as many images of Menander as there are of the other most popular portraits.

Menander is also remarkably long-lived. The early third-century B.C. original was reproduced in abundance over a span of nearly 700 years. Although the peak of Menander's popularity appears to have been in the first and second centuries A.D., it is significant that portraits continued being made in the fourth and the fifth centuries. At least six representations of the poet survive from this period and will be discussed below. Given that most of the known men of letters do not reappear after the crisis of the third century, it is not only noteworthy that Menander resurfaces, but also interesting that he does so in such comparative quantity.

Inevitably accidents of survival color this overview, but even allowing for these distortions, it is clear that the Menander image was overwhelmingly popular. Consistency in portrait typology parallels this popularity: a Menander of the first century is essentially that of the fifth. This constancy is worth

⁴ Richter 54–56, figs. 1–127; Richter/Smith 139–150, figs. 102–109.

⁵ Richter 109–119, figs. 456–573; Richter/Smith 198–204, figs. 159–165.

⁶ Richter 214–223, figs. 1397–1513; Richter/Smith 108–113, figs. 72–74.

⁷ Richter 194–200, figs. 1149–1225; Richter/Smith 116–119, figs. 77–80.

⁸ Richter 204–205, figs. 1268–1324; Richter/Smith 129–131, figs. 91–93.

⁹ Richter 124–133, figs 611–716; Richter/Smith 205–209, figs. 167–170.

¹⁰ Richter 58–66, figs. 131–221; Richter 1984, 191–192, fig. 151.

noting, as some images, such as those of Homer¹¹ or Socrates,¹² have varying typologies that come and go with time.

Such typological consistency is useful as it provides a platform from which to observe changes in the technical rendering and formal conception of the Menander image that do occur over time. Specifically, what it reveals is a transformation in the rendering of the type that takes place in the fourth and fifth centuries. Thus, while late Hellenistic busts and those of the first and second centuries A.D. are remarkably close in appearance, conforming in this consistency to the look of the third-century B.C. original from which they derive, versions of the fourth and fifth centuries show a marked change in style and technique that gives the poet a new look. Two portraits, one from the first century B.C. (*fig. 1*), one from the first A.D. (*fig. 3*), exemplify late Hellenistic/early Imperial renderings of the Menander type. In both images the poet's head tilts forward and turns slightly to one side, creating a sense of torsion. The depiction of neck muscles and tendons in varying states of tension and relaxation enhances the sense of motion, as does the poet's gaze, which is directed downwards and to one side. Within this larger composition, a naturalistic sense of proportion regulates Menander's distinctive features, while the carving and finish of the marble's surface documents the rise and fall of the skin across the underlying skeletal structure and with it the fine net of lines and wrinkles characteristic of the sagging skin of a man no longer in the first flush of youth.

These early portraits stand in sharp contrast to late antique representations. Six sculptured portraits of Menander are known from the period. Of these only two survive, an early

¹¹ Homer appears in three variants. See Richter 47–53, figs. 21–53; Richter/Smith 140–147, figs. 102–107. The earliest, the Epimenides type, dates to ca. 450 B.C. A second version, the Modena type, dates to the first half of the fourth century followed by the Apollonios of Tyana type of ca. 300, and, finally, the Hellenistic Blind Homer of the second century B.C.

¹² Socrates appears in two types: Richter 110–115, figs. 456–531; Richter/Smith 140–144, figs. 102–104. Richter believes Type A to be an earlier image set up by Socrates' friends after his death; Type B, which she considers later, may reproduce an original by Lysippos.

fourth-century bust from Ephesos¹³ (*fig. 4*) and a medallion portrait, also of the fourth century, formerly in the collection at Marbury Hall, Cheshire, and now in the Sackler Gallery at Harvard University¹⁴ (*fig. 5*). A third portrait, a herm from the late Roman villa at Wellschbillig (*fig. 6*), may also represent Menander; however, like almost all the portraits from the villa's collection, the poor quality of the image makes the subject difficult of identification.¹⁵ Three more images, works that have been either destroyed or lost, are known from the photographic record: a medallion portrait that was once in Smyrna¹⁶ (*fig. 7*); and two busts, one from the area of Konya¹⁷ (*fig. 8*) and another of unknown provenance and location¹⁸ (*fig. 9*), both of which appear to have been remodeled from a medallion format.

With the exception of the Wellschbillig herm, the late depictions of Menander conform to the typology of the third-century B.C. portrait: all show the poet with his characteristic facial

¹³ Ephesus Museum inv. no. 755. See Richter 233, no. 47, fig. 1636; J. Inan and E. Rosenbaum, *Roman and Early Byzantine Portrait Sculpture in Asia Minor* (London 1966) 146–147, pl. Cl.2; S. Erdemgil, *Ephesus Museum Catalogue* (Istanbul 1989) 33.

¹⁴ Fogg Art Museum inv. no. 1991.63. See Richter 227, no. 2, figs. 1528–30; Richter/Smith 161, fig. 122A; A. Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain* (transl. C. A. M. Fennell, Cambridge 1882) 514–515, no. 40; D. von Bothmer and C. Vermeule, “Notes on a New Edition of Michaelis: Ancient Marbles of Great Britain Part II,” *AJA* 60 (1956) 337; and Palagia. The Fogg labels the medallion as second century; however, the format and formal aspects of the medallion indicate a later date. Smith (152 n.109) also includes the Marbury Hall medallion in a list of late antique portraits of Menander.

¹⁵ Welschbillig Herm 35, inv. no. 19123. See H. Wrede, *Die spätantike Hermengalerie von Welschbillig: Untersuchungen zur Kunsttradition im 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr. und zur allgemeinen Bedeutung des antiken Hermenmals* (Berlin 1972) 52–54, 108, pl. 10.1–2.

¹⁶ Formerly in the Evangelical School, Smyrna; destroyed 1922. Richter 227, no. 3, figs. 1522–23.

¹⁷ Museum of Konya. Richter 233, no. 46, fig. 1637; W. H. Buckler, W. M. Calder, and C. W. M. Cox, “Asia Minor 1924: Monuments from Iconium, Lycaonia and Isauria,” *JRS* 14 (1924) 46, no. 33 and pl. VII.33.

¹⁸ Richter 234 no. 53, figs. 1569–72; no 54, figs. 1556–57.

features, the aquiline nose, thin lips, and high cheekbones, beneath a crop of tousled hair. In terms of format, medallion portraits predominate, with four of the six representations so sculptured. Busts and medallions alike eschew the relaxed compositional torsion, the head tilt, and the accompanying downward gaze of the early portraits, in favor of an upright, forward facing pose in which the chin lifts slightly and the eyes stare straight out and up. As a result there is little or no sense of motion. It is as if each of the images holds its breath. Within the larger compositional structure, facial organization confirms this rigidity. Menander's characteristic features appear frozen and simplified, the result of iconographic and technical changes in the rendering of the portrait. Most obvious is the treatment of the eyes, which are now proportionately larger within the face. This increase in scale complements the open, upward gaze, as does the use of the drill, a technique not present in the early versions, to define the pupil and the iris within the eye and enhance the eye cavity itself. Skin treatment is likewise transformed. A smooth, uniform carving of the surface together with a flat finish replaces the careful modulation of texture and surface of the earlier versions with the result that wrinkles are virtually non-existent with the exception of a single crease crossing the forehead in a ridge and the sharp lines that descend from the wing of the nostril to terminate on either side of the outer corner of the mouth without actually joining the lips. The flat finish contrasts with hair that sweeps on to the forehead from the back of the skull in a series of deeply cut, cleanly ordered waves that themselves represent a more careful ordering of the earlier Menander's characteristically tousled coiffeur. The resulting impression is of a tense, symmetrically designed figure whose features possess a mask-like quality.

The technical and formal characteristics of the late Menander portrait are consistent with what can be reasonably expected of fourth- and fifth-century period style. The same trends may be observed in imperial portraiture and in the representation of Roman elites.¹⁹ Indeed, Inan and Rosen-

¹⁹ On portraiture in the fourth and fifth centuries see H. P. L'Orange, *Das spätantike Herrscherbild von Diokletian bis zu den Konstantin-Söhnen* (Berlin

baum, noting a similar rigidity in pose, proportioning of facial features, and treatment of skin, established the date of the Ephesos bust on the basis of a comparison with the colossal fourth-century head of Constantine from the Basilica Nova in Rome.²⁰ Later fourth-century portraits of the Theodosian emperors and their contemporaries show similar preoccupations, as do honorific portraits of high-ranking citizens from Rome and the cities of the Empire.

What did the “period eye,” that package of ideas, associations, and expectations that defined a viewer’s experience of visual form at a given point in history,²¹ understand in this particular style? In the images of their emperors late antique viewers saw the picture of majesty conveyed through a physiognomy of divine inspiration.²² That physiognomy, characterized

1984), and R. Stichel, *Die römische Kaiserstatue am Ausgang der Antike. Untersuchungen zum plastischen Kaiserporträt seit Valentinian I* (Rome 1982). See also Ammianus Marcellinus 16.10.10, who observes Constantius exhibiting the same attributes as sculpture, specifically the frontal, rigid pose and the fixed, staring eyes.

²⁰ Inan/Rosenbaum, *Sculpture* 147.

²¹ M. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*² (Oxford 1988) 29–108, develops the concept of the “period eye” around the basic idea that forms and the elements of style conjure specific ideas and associations that create meaning in and of themselves. This idea is also explored as a theory of “modes” by E. Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1977). For the relationship between style and meaning in Roman art see O. Brendel, *Prolegomena to the Study of Roman Art* (New Haven/London 1979).

²² On physiognomy in antiquity the classic study is E. C. Evans, “Physiognomics in the Ancient World,” *TAPS* N.S. 59.5 (1969) 5–83; more recently, T. Barton, *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics and Medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor 1994) 95–133; S. Swain (ed.), *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon’s Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam* (Oxford 2007). Physiognomy addressed the relationship between character and the body, the way in which physical form embodied and expressed the psychology of the personality. In classical antiquity the study derives from Aristotle; however, there is a surge of interest in physiognomic study both in the second century A.D. during the period of the Second Sophistic and in late antiquity; authors include Galen and Polemon (2nd century), Adamantius and Oribasius (4th century). Both Galen and Oribasius were physicians, indicating the extent to which physiognomy was

above all by the wide eyes with their fixed heaven-directed gaze and the overall tension of face and pose, had a long history. In the Greek world, it evolved first in the context of ruler portraits. Lysippos of Sikyon's portrait of Alexander the Great appears to have introduced some of these features as a means to express the Macedonian ruler's divinely inspired character, and the type was disseminated in free-standing sculpture and coin issues.²³ So successful was the image that it gave rise both to the particular literary characterization of Alexander, and to a more generalized representational tradition of divine kingship that was taken over in the Roman period and endured well into late antiquity and the middle ages.²⁴

From the fourth century on, these characteristics appeared in connection with other types of portraits, specifically those of philosophers and other men of letters. A set of fifth-century medallion portraits from Aphrodisias that includes images of Socrates, Aristotle, and Pythagoras together with those of Pindar, Alexander, Alcibiades, and Apollonios of Tyana demonstrates the period style in just such a context.²⁵ Each man, whether philosopher, poet, or political figure, projects stiffly

part and parcel of medical learning and a diagnostic tool. None of these texts outlines a specific physiognomy of divine inspiration. They are, rather, guides on how to read the individual features of a body. Definitions and larger readings appear contingent upon the larger context, although there is repeated emphasis on eyes (bright, clear, gleaming, large) as an index of divine inspiration. No mention is made of specific poses or of skin. See Swain 182 for charts demonstrating the range of physical forms, their combinations, and interpretive possibilities. Many of the standard physiognomic forms, among them that of divine inspiration, may have appeared first in the visual context. For a discussion of the relationship between the visual and the verbal in this context see J. Elsner, "Physiognomics: Art and Text," in Swain 203–224.

²³ On the portrait of Alexander the Great see Richter 255–256, figs. 1716–40; Richter/Smith 225–228, figs. 186–191. Cf. H. P. L'Orange, *Apotheosis in Ancient Portraiture* (New Rochelle 1982) 11–38; R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* (Oxford 1988); and A. Stewart, *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics* (Berkeley 1993).

²⁴ On the imagery of divine kingship see L'Orange, *Apotheosis*, and *Studies in the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World* (Oslo 1953).

²⁵ Smith 127–155.

from the center of his circular frame. Eyes dominate the faces, the emphasis created through a combination of enlarged proportion and sculpturing techniques that include, as in the Menander portrait, not only the drilling of the pupil, but also the carving of the eye cavity itself and the arching brow above. Skin is generally uniform, save for the clearly indicated thought lines that traverse the forehead.

As R. R. R. Smith suggests, the Aphrodisias medallions, which probably should be associated with a local philosophical school with Neo-Pythagorean leanings, present the practitioners of this philosophical tradition as heroic visionaries charged with the divine light of wisdom and inspiration.²⁶ The medallion format itself conjures an elevated, honorific association. Additionally the tension in the figures' pose adds the gloss of energized, ecstatic inspiration by conveying the sense that the sitters are physically charged. This interpretation derives from the kind of treatment afforded royals and differs from the self-possessed and sober images of ancient philosophers sculptured in the early and middle Empire which tend to replicate the formal qualities of the original portraits from which they derive. As such it gives an insight into the revised view of the role of philosophy prevalent in the fourth and fifth centuries, specifically the belief that such study not only trained the mind, but also was the prime vehicle through which to undertake the quest for and achievement of a personal holiness.²⁷

The late antique visualization of Menander participates in this same visual tradition. Not only do the Menander portraits show the same stylistic qualities as the Aphrodisias medallions, in several instances they also share the same medallion format,

²⁶ On the association with the philosophical school and the visionary aspect of the portraits see Smith 135, 138, 143–144, 153–154. Compare Smith's observations regarding visionary physiognomy with those of Zanker 320–327 and D. E. L. Haynes, "A Late Antique Portrait Head in Porphry," *BurlMag* 118 (1976) 350–357.

²⁷ Smith 131. See G. Fowden, "The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society," *JHS* 102 (1982) 33–59, for the idea of philosophy in late antiquity. R. Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch* (Princeton 2007) 62, notes the complex interrelationship between the disciplines of rhetoric and philosophy in late antiquity and the blurring of the lines between the two.

a mode of presentation designed to convey special honor both to gods and to mortals of high culture.²⁸ Thus, formal and presentational choices work together to present Menander as a visionary sage, one of the inspired holy men of late antiquity.²⁹ This image of the poet is interesting in that it is completely at odds with the persona of Menander as described in both the early sources and the portrait created in his honor. The literary record makes it clear that contemporaries judged Menander foppish and effeminate. One writer referred to him twice as *ho kalos*,³⁰ while another remarked more expansively that he was “anointed with perfume, effeminate in dress, walking with delicate and languid steps.”³¹ The statue by Kephisodotos and Timarchos appears to have captured this ethos.

Recent studies by Paul Zanker and Olga Palagia identify the means by which the portrait conveyed this character.³² Both Zanker and Palagia base their assessment on questions of grooming and fashion. Menander’s clean-shaven face and artfully tousled coiffeur, together with a costume made up of a loose chiton and voluminously draped himation that fell below the ankles, reflect female modes of dress and with them a concern for appearance that would have been understood in third-century B.C. Athens as effeminate.

As Zanker points out (85–89), this mode of presentation must have been a startling anomaly in an Athens dominated by

²⁸ Smith 131.

²⁹ For the Holy Man in pagan and Christian traditions see P. Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antique Society,” *JRS* 61 (1971) 80–101; L. Beiler, *Theios Aner. Das Bild des “Göttlichen Menschen” in Spätantike und Frühchristentum* (Darmstadt 1976); Fowden, *JHS* 102 (1982) 33–59; L’Orange, *Apotheosis*; Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity. A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley 1983); B. Blackburn, *Theios Aner and the Markan Miracle Traditions* (Tübingen 1991) 1–96; G. Anderson, *Sage, Saint, and Sophist: Holy Men and their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (London/New York 1994); J. A. Francis, *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-Century Pagan World* (University Park 1995).

³⁰ Ath. 248D, 364D.

³¹ Phaedrus *Fab.* 5.1.12–13: *unguento delibutus, vestitu fluens, / veniebat gressu delicato et languido.*

³² Zanker 77–85 and Palagia.

statues of men seen to have been made of sterner stuff. The portrait of Menander's older contemporary Demosthenes (384–322) (*fig.10*) exemplifies the more conventional male image. Demosthenes appears as a standing, bare-chested figure clad in the decorously wrapped himation hiked up well above the ankle. Inelegantly cropped hair and a thick beard confirm him as a thinker oblivious to the superficialities of personal appearance and the lure of soft living implied by such concerns. This was an image of engaged, manly gravity deeply at odds with the depiction of Menander's distracted, feminine grace.

Given the idiosyncratic quality of the Menander portrait within this larger context, how was this particular depiction of character to be understood? Considering what he believes to be the fundamentally apolitical nature of Menander's comedies, and the fact that the poet chose to live in Piraeus rather than in Athens proper, Zanker (80–81) proposed that the portrait be seen as the image of an effeminate, elitist fop removed from the mainstream of public life and civic engagement, a suggestion he supported not only with the visual evidence of grooming and dress, but also with that of the seated pose and the high-backed chair in which the figure lounged. For Zanker the seated pose, so much in contrast to the norms of contemporary portraiture, together with the design of the chair itself signaled associations with the female world of domestic interiors, and, as such, expressed wealth, extravagance, and with them detachment from the mainstream of public life.

Palaigia (291), considering the same body of evidence, offered a corrective to this interpretation, preferring to see the chair not as the accoutrement of a domestic setting, but rather as a representation of the honorary seats (*prohedra*) in the theater that was Menander's realm and in which the statue stood. In so doing she brought the poet back into the public sphere.

Palaigia's attribution of the image to a public setting is consistent with the aims of third-century B.C. portraiture; but the chair in which Menander sits is not the monumental *prohedra* of the theater, but the more delicate *klismos*.³³ Although Zanker

³³ On the *klismos* see G. M. A. Richter, *Ancient Furniture* (Oxford 1927) 45, and *Furniture of the Greeks, Etruscans and Romans*. (London 1966) 33–37.

saw the *klismos* as an index of a domestic and therefore the private setting associated with the world of women, in fact the chair appeared in all manner of contexts, public and private. Most notable is its use in theatrical settings.³⁴ Because Menander was a creature of the theater and because his comedies treat overwhelmingly of domestic matters, it is possible that the chair indicates not the poet's private persona, but rather the world of his plays and through them Menander's own place in the larger context of Athenian society.

Menander's appearance is in keeping with such a public persona. As Palagia noted, the effeminate aspects of his personal style, the coiffure, the beardlessness, and the dress, bespoke allegiance to the Macedonians by whom such elements of grooming and fashion were prized. Palagia (293) also observed that while Menander's residence in Piraeus may well have distanced him from Athens proper, it also placed him near the Macedonian garrison that was stationed there. As a result of these factors she argued that the statue be understood as a very public advertisement of a political allegiance rather than any statement about a retiring nature as suggested by Zanker or homosexual orientation as elaborated in her own argument. Specifically she linked the image to Macedonian Athens and posited that it was dedicated by the pro-Macedonian faction.

In the six hundred years between the creation of the poet's portrait at Athens and its display in such cities of the later Roman world as Ephesos, Aphrodisias, and Rome itself, the likeness of Menander changed radically in terms of style and meaning. So great was this transformation that it is a fair bet that a Menander of the fourth century A.D. would have been unintelligible to an Athenian of the third century B.C. The problem is not likely to have been based on a difference in physical likeness, for the late images, although simplified to some degree, preserve Menander's distinctive features. Instead it would probably have rested in the portrait's stylistic transformation and its implications, a transformation that brought with it a dramatically reworked definition of character that saw the political beast of the third century B.C. become the embodi-

³⁴ See Richter, *Ancient Furniture*, figs. 135 and 138 for illustrations.

ment of inspired intellectual endeavor. How in the centuries between the creation of the Menander portrait and its reception in the world of the fourth and fifth centuries did this transformation come about?

Seeds for a revisionist interpretation of Menander were sown at his initial reception into the Roman arena in the second century B.C. As the studies of Zanker and Palagia make clear, the forms used to fashion the original Menander tribute derived from and addressed contemporary understandings of and attitudes towards social norms as expressed through the visual signals of grooming and dress. With the later copying of Menander's portrait and its dissemination throughout the Roman world that particular context was lost. Thus, although the same forms were preserved, the viewing context and the habits of looking that had made sense of them were not, with the result that a new idea of Menander and his identity came to the fore.

What the Greeks of the late fourth and early third centuries B.C. had viewed as effeminate, the Romans of the Republican and early imperial ages perceived in completely different ways. Consider, for example, the issue of beardlessness.³⁵ In the Republican period and the first century, the clean-shaven jaw was no longer a sign of effeminacy, but of traditional manly virtue, as any of a number of Republican busts or the image of no less staunch a traditionalist than Augustus make clear.³⁶

Nor was the transformation in reception limited to Roman circles. By the second century B.C., although men of letters continued to be depicted with beards, the clean-shaven face had become the norm among statesmen of the Greek-speaking world, a trend that initially derived from the desire to imitate Alexander the Great.³⁷ This fashion continued until the second

³⁵ On Roman beardlessness see Zanker 218 and Palagia 294 who notes that Menander "lost his bite" in the Roman period when clean-shaven men were the norm, and Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* 125–143.

³⁶ For examples see D. E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven/London 1992) figs. 15 and 16 (Republican) and 40–42 (Augustus).

³⁷ For the persistence of the beard in Greek men of letters see Richter 293–242, figs. 1652–55 (Aratos); 242–243, figs. 1666–67 (Moschion); 242, figs. 1670–71 (Apollonios Rhodios); 248–255, figs. 1682–96 (Karneades).

century A.D. and the revival of the philosopher's beard under the Antonines in an effort to conjure the image of the philosopher-king.³⁸

Likewise, the poet's dress took on a completely different set of associations. In the portrait busts favored by the Romans over the full body representations of the Greeks, Menander's dress is less overt a feature than it was in the original statue. If it appears at all, only the neck of the chiton and the top of the himation are included. In this context the voluminous dress of Menander's initial portrait, which was nowhere to be found, was understood not as ostentatious and effeminate, but rather as the sober tunic and pallium that was the sartorial equivalent of the dark suit in Roman aristocratic circles. In the blink of an eye, the fop of Athenian visual parlance had become a conservative Roman gentleman.

That gentleman was well and warmly received into society. The numerous copies of the Menander portrait that survive as busts and herms from the late Republic and the first and second centuries of the Empire attest to his popularity. Displayed in contexts public and private alongside images of other men of letters,³⁹ the portrait enshrined Menander in the pantheon of literati as a playwright, and it was on this basis that his reputation rested. From the second century B.C. on, his plays began to be produced with increasing frequency, and, concomitantly, these works served as the inspiration for the writings of such Republican comedians as Plautus, Terence, and Caecilius Statius.⁴⁰ What was appreciated in Menander and the New Comedy of which he was the archetype was the plausibility of situation that the poet introduced and with it the

For the beard in imitation of Alexander see Richter 255–276, figs. 1716–76, and Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* 46; cf. Stewart, *Faces*.

³⁸ Zanker 198–266.

³⁹ Pliny (*HN* 34.9–10) lays out the development of the use of commemorative portrait sculpture among the Greeks and Romans. On the display of portrait sculpture see T. Lorenz, *Galerien von griechischen Philosophen- und Dichterbildnissen bei den Römern* (Mainz 1965).

⁴⁰ R. L. Hunter, *The New Comedy of Greece and Rome* (Cambridge 1985) 1–23.

naturalism of expression brought to bear on metrical writing. To this was added a delight in Menander's sense of observation and his keen characterizations.

So great was the value placed on these aspects of his writing that Menander became, by the first century B.C., a standard author in the school curriculum, for it was felt that by emulating his observational tactics and imitating his literary style, the aspiring young orator would learn the essential rhetorical trick of describing and expressing character through clear linguistic structure, a skill that would not only amuse the audience, but also, by dint of its truthfulness and naturalism, prompt serious reflection.⁴¹

It was this sober response to comedy that led Quintilian to praise Menander as the ideal author and mentor: "Now the careful study of Menander alone, would, in my opinion, be sufficient to develop all those qualities with the production of which my present work is concerned: so full is his representation of actual life, so rich is his power of invention and his gift of style, so perfectly does he adapt himself to every kind of circumstance, character, and emotion" (10.1.69). By the second century Plutarch in contemplating the literary prowess outlined by Quintilian would observe, "For what reason, in fact, is it truly worthwhile for an educated man to go to the theater, except to enjoy Menander?" (*Mor.* 854B, transl. Fowler).

Plutarch's enjoyment of Menander came at the height of the playwright's popularity. By the fourth century it was no longer possible to share his response. Although Menander's works appear to have survived adulterated in performances that were largely private in nature, there is no evidence of any full-scale theatrical production after the early third century.⁴² This lack

⁴¹ For Romans' estimation of the value of Menander see Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.65–72. On the use of Menander at varying stages in the school curriculum see H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (London 1956) 156 (primary education), 163 (secondary education), 188 (higher education); N. G. Wilson *Scholars of Byzantium* (London 1983) 18–20; R. Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton 2001) 199–201.

⁴² See C. P. Jones, "Greek Drama in the Roman Empire," in R. Scodel (ed.), *Theater and Society in the Classical World* (Ann Arbor 1993) 39–52, for a

of testimony is significant because it suggests that Menander's late reputation rested primarily on his role in the educational system rather than on theatrical performance, and that it was from this educational context that a new understanding of Menander as the divinely-inspired figure of the later portraits developed.

Menander's place in the school curriculum remained secure throughout late antiquity even as the plays fell out of production. What changed was the means of contact with the comedy. Taken off the stage, Menander was now associated almost exclusively with the educational traditions of *paideia*, arguably late antiquity's most potent social institution. In fifth-century Gaul, Sidonius Apollinaris (*Ep.* 4.12.1) read the plays of Menander with his son as a pedagogical exercise, and at the other end of the Mediterranean in Antioch Libanius ran his students through their paces with classroom declamations.⁴³ Further, by the fourth century students at all levels east and west were increasingly likely to experience Menander in fragmented form as a series of excerpted passages. Pithy one-line remarks (*monostichoi*) such as "The servile are lovers of money"⁴⁴ were combined with character sketches and longer passages of a home-spun philosophical bent. These anthologies (*gnomai* or *sententiae*) were intended to provide models for writing and oratory at all levels of the curriculum.⁴⁵ Younger students copied the shorter maxims to improve penmanship and writing

discussion of Greek theatrical performances in the Roman world. The third-century terminus for Menander performances rests on the evidence of a lead theater token found in the Athenian Agora at third-century levels bearing the title of Menander's play *Theophoroumene*. See Jones 43 for discussion of the token.

⁴³ For Libanius' use of Menander see S. G. Nervegna, *Studies in the Reception of Menander in Antiquity* (diss. Univ. Toronto 2005) 146. Libanius himself used Menandrian models of characterization in his own speeches. See D. A. Russell, *Libanius. Imaginary Speeches* (London 1996) 113 and 124, for discussion and *Or.* 26 and 27 in the same volume for examples.

⁴⁴ S. Jaekel, *Menandri Sententiae* (Leipzig 1964) p.35.45.

⁴⁵ See W. Görler, *Menandrou Gnomai* (diss. Frei Univ. Berlin 1963), and J. Barns, "A New Gnomologium: with Some Remarks on Gnomonic Anthologies," *CQ* 44 (1950) 126–137 and *N.S.* 1 (1951) 1–19.

skills, while the longer character sketches provided older students with models for the more complicated and intense exercises that lay at the root of higher oratory.⁴⁶ This approach to the treatment of a poetic oeuvre, at once fragmentary and practical, may well have shaped a new idea of Menander. Because they were taken out of context, many of the poet's one-line quotations and shorter passages, remarks originally intended for ironic, comic effect, could be understood in a new way as solemn declarations of universal truths, with the result that Menander came to be valued not only for his literary and rhetorical prowess but also for the moral weight and philosophical insight that the selections implied.

The late antique sculptured portrait of Menander appears to have been a response to this glossed identity. The technical and stylistic choices that exchanged the thoughtful, distracted gaze of the original portrait for the attentive, receptive stare of the late version bestowed upon the poet a physiognomy of divine inspiration appropriate to his new pedagogical role. If this is the case, it represents the active artistic transformation of an image for purposes of character description by means of style and technique, in contrast to the passive refashioning of identity that took place owing to changes in viewing habits at the initial reception of Menander's portrait in the Republican age.

This deliberate physiognomic transformation seems consistent with a larger vision of Menander that was played out in other visual media. Portraits of Menander appear in late Roman floor mosaics, among them the third-century Monnus mosaic from Trier⁴⁷ that shows the poet in the company of Homer, Hesiod, and the Latin literati Ennius, Virgil, Cicero, and Livy, and a late third- or fourth-century pavement from Mytilene⁴⁸ made up of ten square panels that include, in addi-

⁴⁶ Marrou, *History* 156, 163.

⁴⁷ Landesmuseum, Trier, inv. mos. 1 nr. 1231. See K. Parlasca, *Die römischen Mosaiken in Deutschland* (Berlin 1959) 41–44, pl. 42.1, 43–47. For Menander himself see pl. 46.3. His face is damaged and the identification is made on the basis of inscription.

⁴⁸ The excavators suggested late III/early IV: S. Charitonides, L. Kahil, R. Ginouvès, *Les mosaïques de la maison du Ménandre à Mytilène* (*AntK Beih.* 6 [1970]), esp. 11–12. J. R. Green, *Theatre in Ancient Greek Society* (London

tion to the portrait itself, seven scenes from Menander's plays, Thalia the muse of comedy, and Socrates with his followers Simmias and Kebes. In both of these pavements Menander appears in association with philosophers and other men of letters. While scenes from Menander's plays are the stuff of mosaic representation as early as the second century B.C.,⁴⁹ the depiction of Menander with other literati in this medium is new and suggests a reassessment of Menander that emphasizes his membership in a specifically literary and philosophical canon at the expense of his theatrical output.

This emphasis is similar in substance to the new image of Menander in portrait sculpture. Like the sculptural image, the mosaic portrait proposes Menander as a thinker. It does so by means of comparison. Specifically, the inclusion of Menander in the company of other intellectuals, philosophers and men of letters alike, emphasizes his intellectual status and with it his role in the distinctive tradition of *paideia*. Missing from this presentation, however, is any overt manipulation of representational style. Unlike the sculptural portraits in which a distinctive iconography of style transforms the face, the mosaic representations show no clear physiognomy of inspiration with the result that the Menander of the mosaic portraits lacks the intense, transcendent character of the sculptural images.

Context may explain this difference. The mosaics from Trier and Mytilene come from domestic settings and bespeak the larger admiration for the intellectual traditions of *paideia* that

1994) 164–166, prefers a fourth-century date, as does L. Berczelly, “The Date and Significance of the Menander Mosaics at Mytilene,” *BICS* 35 (1998) 119–126, who argues for the end of the fourth century.

⁴⁹ For a catalogue of representations of scenes and accompanying bibliography see T. B. L. Webster, *Monuments Illustrating New Comedy*³ (London 1995), catalogue numbers 6CM 1–2; 2DM 1; 3DM 1–6; 5DM 1–2; 6DM 1–6; 5FM 1; 6FM 1–7; 6HM 1–4; 3NM 1–3; 4NM 1–2; 3RM 1; 4RM 1–2; 5RM 1–5; 6RM 1; 3SM 1–5; 4SM 1; 6WM 1–7; 4XM 1; 5XM 1. Most recently C. Abadie-Reynal, J.-P. Darmôn, A.-M. Manière-Lévêque, “La maison et la mosaïque des *Synaristosai* (Les Femmes au déjeuner de Ménandre),” in R. Early et al., *Zeugma: Interim Reports* (*JRA* Suppl. 51 [2003]) 79–99. Nervegna, *Studies* 90–94, discusses the placement of floor mosaics with scenes from Menander's comedies in domestic contexts, noting that images are only in public areas of the house.

were such a defining feature of late Roman elite life.⁵⁰ Their domestic provenance suggests, however, a tempered approach to this tradition, one in which an awareness of and participation in the traditions of *paideia* are more a matter of polished style than fervent substance.⁵¹

Information about the original setting of any of the late Menander portraits is scant. Only the Ephesos bust, which was found in the Scholastika baths, has a secure source;⁵² however, the medallion format of the majority of the Menander images demands a fixed architectural context. On the model of the Aphrodisias medallion portraits, that setting would most likely have been a library or a school. Indeed, Smith (134) observed that Menander would probably have been paired with Pindar in the lost set of medallion portraits from Smyrna, themselves related to the Aphrodisias group. Such a context, devoted to and equipped for the development of the life of the mind, must have had about it an aura of intensity that differed from that of the domestic. Both the archaeology of the Aphrodisias school and the reports of the rhetorical centers of Athens and Antioch

⁵⁰ On *paideia* in late Roman society see Av. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Berkeley 1991); P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (Madison 1992); Criore, *Gymnastics and School of Libanius*. On the manifesting of *paideia* in visual terms see S. E. Bassett, "Historiae custos: Sculpture and Tradition in the Baths of Zeuxippos," *AJA* 100 (1996) 491–506; E. Csapo, "Performance and Iconographic Tradition in the Illustrations of Menander," *Syllecta Classica* 10 (1999) 155–188, and L. M. Stirling, *The Learned Collector: Mythological Statuettes and Taste in Late Antique Gaul* (Ann Arbor 2005).

⁵¹ Attitudes towards *paideia* differed greatly. On the one hand there were those such as Libanius and his contemporaries Themistius and Himerius for whom *paideia* represented a way of life and for whom no amount of immersion in study was enough. For intensity of devotion to study see Criore, *School of Libanius* 156, who discusses Libanius' remark, "my bride is my art" (*Or.* 1.54). On the other hand there were those for whom a far more practical attitude held sway. Specifically, for the upper classes *paideia* was often viewed as little more than a tradition that provided the cultural polish necessary to attain public appointments and status. See Criore, *Gymnastics* 249–251 and *School of Libanius* 42, 130, 156–158. See also Csapo, *Syllecta Classica* 10 (1999) 155–161.

⁵² Richter 233; Erdemgil, *Ephesus Museum* 33.

indicate that students lived together away from their families in an environment of full scholastic immersion that was intellectually, emotionally, and physically demanding.⁵³ In this context the inspired, transcendent picture of Menander and his cohort, their faces the very image of late antique society's "holier souls,"⁵⁴ may well have contributed to that aura.

In observing that "the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind such as soon escape the memory, and are rarely transmitted by tradition" Samuel Johnson might easily have been speaking of Menander. While the succession of copies produced in the period of the fourth and fifth centuries retained the sitter's physical likeness, through changes in technique and style they documented a personality that had indeed lost "all resemblance of the original." Although for Dr. Johnson such a loss represented a failure, it is this very flexibility of interpretation that secured the success of Menander's portrait across the centuries. Menander remained popular for the simple reason that his poetry continued to capture imagination by taking on new life and meaning in successive eras. That new life and meaning came to be expressed in the transformation of his image.

To observe that a physiognomy of divine inspiration was applied to and radically transformed the portrait of Menander is only a first step in the process of understanding the image. Such transformations are not ends in themselves, but respond to and shape a society's aspirations and with them its values.⁵⁵

⁵³ On the demands of schooling see Cribiore, *Gymnastics* 251 and Libanius *Ep.* 139.

⁵⁴ The author of the *Historia Augusta* describes a set of images in the lararium of Severus Alexander to which he refers as *animas sanctiores*: *HA Severus Alex.* 29.2.

⁵⁵ In a related manner Brown, *JRS* 61 (1971) 81, observes with respect to the Christian holy man of late antiquity: "In studying both the most admired and the most detested figures in any society, we can see, as seldom through other evidence, the nature of the average man's expectations and hopes for himself. It is for the historian, therefore, to analyze this image as a product of the society around the holy man. Instead of retaining the image of the holy man as sufficient in itself to explain his appeal to the average Late Roman, we should use the image like a mirror, to catch, from a surprising angle, another glimpse of the average Late Roman."

To what value did the transformed image of Menander speak? Like his cohort from Aphrodisias, Menander was both practitioner and exemplar, an end and a means. As such, and given his prominence in the educational system, it may be that his late antique portrait both offered and responded to a particular view of *paideia* and the possibilities it afforded. Menander's physiognomy of inspiration described the character of a philosopher in wholly late antique terms. Those terms saw the practice of philosophy as an exercise not simply in rational thought, but also in transcendent connection and with it the elevation of human souls.⁵⁶ It was *paideia*, that distinct amalgam of learning and personal conduct, which opened the way to that ultimate goal. In this context, Menander was key. Study of his writing not only equipped the student with the means to observe and understand human experience, but also gave him the ability to formulate a response to that experience in the most eloquent and persuasive manner. In other words, study of Menander developed the ability for both insight and argumentation that were the bedrock of late antique philosophical achievement. Correspondingly his image took on the attributes of that achievement, expressing as it did not only late antique society's regard for the endeavor, but also its belief in its transformative potential. To look at Menander was to see wisdom made manifest. That wisdom was not simply possessed by Menander, it was also derived from him. Through their long years of rhetorical and sophistic study, students imitated Menander's tactics, using his patterns of language to shape and give life to their own habits of thought.⁵⁷ The Menander portrait suggests the outcome of the process. In its physiognomy of inspiration it describes the character of the master and with it the potential for sculpturing individual transformation on the long intellectual journey. As such it spoke to the possibility for everyman's

⁵⁶ Fowden, *JHS* 102 (1982) 33–38.

⁵⁷ On the shaping or imprinting of students see R. Webb "The *Pro-gymnasmata* as Practice," in Yun Lee Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Leiden 2001) 203–224.

personal apotheosis through the structure and rhythms of *paideia*.⁵⁸

November, 2007

Dept. of Art and Art History
Wayne State University
Detroit, MI 48202
aa2582@wayne.edu

- Fig. 1:* Menander, Seminario Patriarcale, Sta. Maria della Salute, Venice
photo: after Richter, fig. 1574
- Fig. 2:* Reconstruction of the Menander statue by Klaus Fittschen
Archäologisches Institut, Göttingen
photo: after Fittschen, *AthMitt* 106 (1991) pl. 74.2
- Fig. 3:* Menander, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection,
Washington, D.C., inv. no. 46.2
photo: after Richter, fig. 1612
- Fig. 4:* Menander, Ephesos Museum, inv. no. 755
photo: after Richter, fig. 1636
- Fig. 5:* Menander, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass., inv. no. 1991.63
photo: after Richter, fig. 1528
- Fig. 6:* Menander(?), Welschbillig Herm 35, Rheinisches Landesmuseum,
Trier, inv. no. 19123
photo: after H. Wrede, *Die spätantike Hermengalerie* pl. 10.2.
- Fig. 7:* Menander, destroyed medallion portrait formerly in the
Evangelical School, Smyrna
photo: after Richter, fig. 1523.
- Fig. 8:* Menander, Konya Museum
photo: after Richter, fig. 1637
- Fig. 9:* Menander, lost
photo: after Richter, fig. 1570.
- Fig. 10:* Demosthenes, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen inv. no. 2782
photo: after Richter, fig. no. 1397.

⁵⁸ This article represents a revised and expanded version of a paper read at the session "From Portrait to Icon: Images of the 'Holier Souls' in Roman and Early Christian Art" held at the 1997 annual meeting of the College Art Association. I thank Alice Christ for her organization of the session and the invitation to speak. Thanks also to Brian Madigan and the anonymous reader for *GRBS*, both of whose comments have helped to make this a better, if still imperfect, paper.

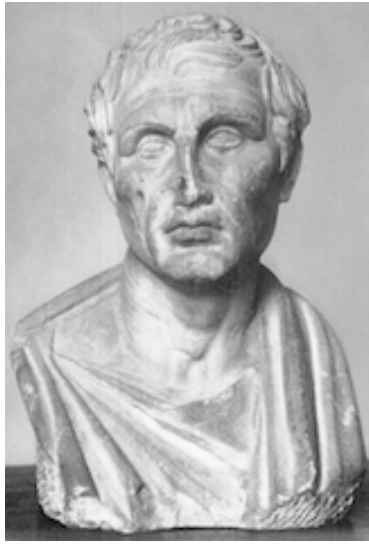


Figure 1



Figure 2

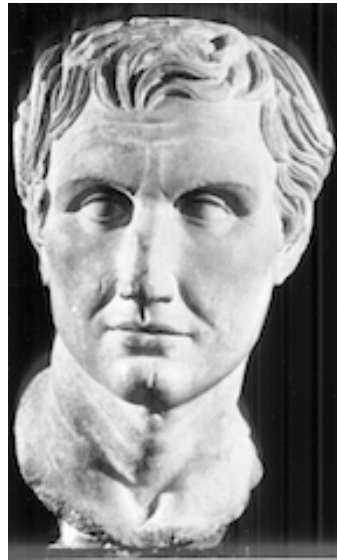


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

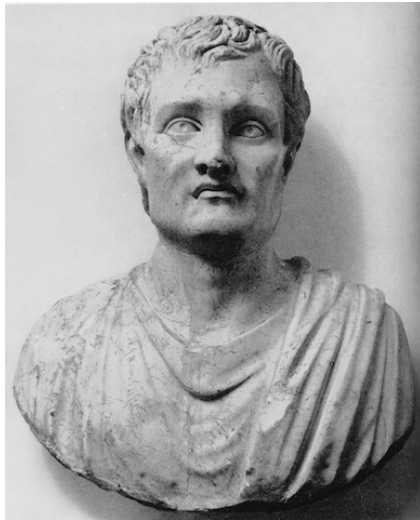


Figure 9



Figure 10