 **LIVING UP TO CONTRASTING PORTRAITURE:  
PLUTARCH ON ALEXANDER THE GREAT,  
AND SIMA QIAN ON THE FIRST QIN EMPEROR\***

by  
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*Il est difficile de comprendre  
combien est grande la ressemblance et la différence  
qu'il y a entre tous les hommes.  
La Rochefoucauld, Maximes écartées, no. 19*

\*This paper is dedicated to David Keightley, in deep friendship and respect, and with profound gratitude.

## INTRODUCTION

The First Qín Emperor Qín Shǐhuáng 秦始皇 (259 BC – 210 BC)<sup>1</sup> probably lived in order to deserve those kinds of stelae inscriptions of which Martin Kern has given us such a useful summary.<sup>2</sup> For all we know, he may even have aimed for something like the twelve gigantic bronze sculptures which he commissioned to be made, but of which we do not have, unfortunately, any trace.<sup>3</sup> He certainly did what he could to become immortal, literally. Sīmǎ

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<sup>1</sup> The title *Qín shǐhuángdì* 秦始皇帝 designates, I think, not a First Emperor of Qín. Nor did it designate the First Emperor of China. It referred to the Sovereign God of All Under Heaven. Of course, the First Emperor was proud indeed to be from, and to reign in, the state of Qín. But his empire was all of *tiān xià* 天下 “All Under Heaven”, which was not at all a *guó* 國 “state”, even less the state of Qín. Neither was *tiān xià* 天下 to be confused with *Huá Xià* 華夏 “the Huá Xià region” that some might want to call “China”.

<sup>2</sup> Kern, Martin, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Representation*, American Oriental Society, New Haven, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> See Lukas Nickel, “Tonkrieger auf der Seidenstrasse. Die Plastiken des Ersten Kaisers von China und die hellenistische Skulptur Zentralasiens” in *Zürich Studies in the History of Art* (Georges Bloch Annual) v. 13-14 (2006-07), pp. 125-149 for an interesting account of the possible Central Asian influence on these developments in China. Compare also Barnhart 1999.

Qiān's 司馬遷 *Shǐjì* 史記 “Records of the Historians”,<sup>4</sup> and in particular the relevant *běnjì* 本紀 “Basic Annals” provides a picture of the First Emperor’s military exploits, his administrative successes, and the megalomaniac ambitions of the man in great detail, albeit in highly critical and even hostile light.

The First Emperor, I have come to feel as I read more about him, conceived of himself first and foremost as a redoubtable heir of a great military tradition, as part of a strategic military and administrative **campaign** and of a political and even divine **ritual**. The picture of his personality was that of a predictably successful uncompromising military leader, a formidable political administrator - and a spiritual megalomaniac..

The First Emperor’s ostensibly preferred reading were tons of administrative documents which he demonstratively and ritually perused, for all to know about. On this point he was, himself, a media man. The First Emperor’s discourse was in the ritualistic inapproachable and deliberate style of a Hú Jǐntào 胡錦濤, not the much more impulsive informal style of the first emperor of the Hàn dynasty, Liú Bāng 劉邦 (256 BC or 247 – 195 BC) who is said have been proposing to piss demonstratively in Confucian (or shall we should hasten to say “classicist”?) hats. The description of this may be exaggerated, but here it is: 沛公不好儒，諸客冠儒冠來者，沛公輒解其冠，溲溺其中。 “The Seigneur of Pèi did not like the Confucians. When all the visitors arrived donning their scholar’s hats he took their hats from them and urinated in them.”<sup>5</sup> One notes with interest that some of the more telling anecdotes about Liú Bāng are

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Lothar von Falkenhausen has kindly instructed me that if there really is Central Asian influence on the First Emperor, then one would have to say that influence would have to be said to have been in no way limited to Qín alone. A possible influence of Alexander on the First Emperor is, of course, intriguing to consider as an historical possibility. However, it has not so far been established.

<sup>4</sup> I dare not follow ubiquitous convention and translate this book-title as if anyone would have attributed the *yī jiā zhī yán* 一家之言 of this book to Sīmǎ Qiān alone, and not at least as much to his father who Sīmǎ Qiān freely acknowledges took the initiative for it. The expression *shǐ jì* 史記 is standardly plural in classical Chinese not only with respect to the *jì* 記 but especially also with respect to the *shǐ* 史 “historians; archivists” responsible for their compilation. It is sobering to think that even *Tài shǐ gōng shū* 太史公書 “The Book of the Grand Archivists” has always been taken in the singular, as if Sīmǎ Qiān had been an unfilial usurper of his father’s grand family project.

<sup>5</sup> 《史記·酈生陸賈列傳》. It is important to remember that the word *gōng* 公, often mechanically translated by “duke”, obviously means nothing of the kind in this context - or indeed in contexts like *Huán gōng* 桓公 standardly mistranslated as “Duke Huán of Qí” when in fact there never was any such thing as a “Duke of Qí”. The rulers of that state having no more than the status of a *hóu* 侯 conventionally translated as “Earl”. In the *Chūnqiū* 春秋 text, for example, there is no *Qí gōng* 齊公 “Duke of Qí”, there are only *Qí hóu* 齊侯 “Earls of Qí”. And of course, there are only “Dukes of Sòng” in that book. (The early evidence on the *wǔ jué* 五爵 “five ranks” is magisterially and conveniently assembled in the three large volumes of Chén Pán 陳槃 1969. See also the specific account of the case of *gōng* 公 in C.N. Tay 1973.)

presented not in his own *Annals* but in other parts of *Shǐjì*.

Liú Bāng's leadership style contrasts importantly with that of the First Emperor. Personalities vary deeply in ancient China, as they do in ancient Greece, even among incumbents of the same kind of high office.

It is indeed striking how Liú Bāng, even after he became Emperor, continued to project such a demonstratively different image from that of the First Emperor. In the description of Sīmǎ Qiān, Liú Bāng always remained impulsive, jovial, poetic, *bon-vivant*. Liú Bāng's official annalistic biography even describes his colourful youth, carefully honed to motivate his later life. And, again for sound historical reasons, we are well-informed also about Liú Bāng's wife who after all came to succeed him as one of the highly important rulers of the Western Hàn.

I set out to contrast the written lives of the First Emperor with that of Alexander. In so doing I shall always keep in mind also the contrast between the written lives of the First Qín Emperor and the First Hàn Emperor, Liú Bāng.<sup>6</sup> And I shall try to remain vividly aware of overemphasising the contrasts I find. I try to work out these contrasts as clearly as I can because they seem to me fundamental to basic cultural patterns of self-fabrication in different cultures. Thus this paper is about cultures of self-fabrication rather than merely about biography and even self-construal.

Alexander, I suggest in any case, projected his personality as that of a superhuman **hero** in an immense imagined epic like that he kept under by his bedside. He conceived of himself as part of an exciting historical (melo-)**drama**, surely designed in part to motivate his soldiers for superhuman military efforts. But Alexander seems to have played out this melodrama for a highly literate aestheticising broader intended public. He became callously terrifying enough, as time went on. But his was the terror created by an excess of heroic and megalomaniac spontaneity and emotionalism mixed with fear, not of deliberate callous strategy.

Alexander's extensive daily journals, the famous *ephemerides*, are lost. However, he did bring along everywhere not only his favourite portraitist but also a host of writers who were watching over and commenting upon his every move. He was evidently keen on literary and artistic publicity. In a rather modern way he often acted demonstratively, for the benefit of the reporters he surrounded himself with. Unlike the First Emperor, he cultivated what was intended to look like spontaneous *parrhēsia* "candidness, informal communicative freedom".

This is not the *parrhēsia* of the Epicurean kind, as in 'I would rather speak with the frankness of a natural philosopher, and reveal the things which are expedient to all mankind, even if no one is going to understand me, than assent to the received opinions and reap the adulation lavishly bestowed by the multitude'. (Vatican sayings. 29. tr. Long/Sedley vol. 1, p. 155) Alexander's *parrhēsia* is more the urbane and sometimes even facetious *parrhēsia* as practiced

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<sup>6</sup> For a distinctly optimistic overview of "Sino-hellenic Studies" see Tanner 2009. For a comparison of historiography more specifically see Mutschler 1997 and Mutschler 2007.

in the informal parts of Plato's dialogues. These important parts of Plato's philosophical discourse display a keen sense for personality demonstratively disjointed from the main philosophical dialogues. For example, the extensive homosexual innuendo against Socrates in the opening pages of Plato's *Protagoras*, serves no further purpose beyond that of bringing to life the social personality of Socrates. The *parrhēsia* elaborated in Plato's banter needs to be discussed quite separately from that of ancient "freedom of speech". *Parrhēsia* as a private virtue coexisted with *parrhēsia* as a political right (freedom of speech) in Plato's time. (See Konstan et al. 2007:3) The transcripts of Michel Foucault's last lectures at the Collège de France provide singularly readable and useful reflections on the importance of *parrhēsia* for the constitution of the individual in ancient Greece.<sup>7</sup> It turns out that the game of private *parrhēsia* is essentially the game of self-construal.

Alexander was preoccupied by his inspiring heroic image among the soldiers: he needed this image to persuade his men. He was also preoccupied with his image also among those intellectuals within his entourage. Alexander aimed for something like ancient "media stardom". The large number of highly entertaining well-staged episodes in his many biographies bear witness to this.

On a personal note, Alexander was flamboyant even about his homosexual preferences and certainly did very little to hide these, although they were not quite as acceptable in his times as some people imagine.<sup>8</sup>

Plutarch (AD 46 - 120) wrote the finest literary and philosophical psychological portrait of Alexander that has come down to us.<sup>9</sup> And Plutarch makes every effort to do justice to the psychological subtleties and idiosyncrasies in Alexander's personality. Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* became one of the most famous biographies in Western literary history.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Foucault 2011: 145: "So we have here—this was the important element that I especially wanted to hold on to today—the emergence of life, of the mode of life as the object of Socratic *parrhēsia* and discourse, of life in relation to which it is necessary to carry out an operation which will be a test, a testing, sifting." Even more important, it seems to me, is the courage to disclose the truth about oneself *to oneself* in self-examination and then self-construal. Compare the excellent edition Michel Foucault, *Le Courage de la vérité. Le gouvernement de soi et des autres. Cours au Collège de France, 1983/4*, 2 vols.. Paris, Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Gallimard, Éditions du Seuil, coll. « Hautes Études », 2009.

<sup>8</sup> See K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality, Updated with a new postscript*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1989 and K.J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality In the Time of Plato and Aristotle*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander was first called "the Great" by Romans around 200 BC. See Plautus *Mostellaria* 3.2.775. I prefer to omit the epithet.

<sup>10</sup> Thus in the present context my comparison has to be with Plutarch rather than with the great comprehensive historiographer Polybius who pays much less attention to psychological detail. See specifically Konrad 1966: 55 (in Russian) who summarises: "Neither Polybius nor Sima Qian are philosophers of history. They are simply historians". Konrad pays no attention to the question of personal portraiture in Polybius and Sīmǎ Qiān. For Polybius the learned survey in Pauly-Wissowa 1894–1980, vol. 21(1952), pp. 1440-1578 and especially Ekstein 2010: 28-117.



Sīmǎ Qiān 司馬遷 (died ca. 86 BC) wrote a much more annalistic critical account of the reign of the First Qín Emperor. Sīmǎ Qiān happens to be the most famous biographer in the Chinese tradition. His *Records of the Historians* is also one of the most famous works in the Chinese literary tradition.

Sīmǎ Qiān and Plutarch are indeed parallel biographers. But they were interestingly different from each other. As we shall see, the difference is philosophically profound.

Plutarch was a private Roman citizen with a private income and a huge private library. Sīmǎ Qiān inherited a post as an Archivist in the imperial court. Sīmǎ Qiān's library was also huge, but it was the official imperial library, built in stone. Of his private library - if indeed he had any such library - we know nothing. Plutarch's private library was the envy of many.

I sympathise with the twentieth century essayist and writer Lǚ Xùn 魯迅: "If one wishes to appreciate a culture of the past and assess its strengths **and weaknesses**, one has to make comparisons with the achievements of other peoples during the same period, and one must measure the development of a culture by comparison with these others."<sup>11</sup>

A few rough comparisons of Alexander with the First Emperor may help to set the scene for our present study of the portraiture of it. And to start with, there is a comment that applies wonderfully to both Alexander and the First Emperor: Lù Jiǎ 陸賈 (died 178 BC) might even more appropriately have applied the following following remark to Alexander than to the Liú Bāng.<sup>12</sup> The exchange illustrates well the liveliness of Sīmǎ Qiān's "analytic narrative" and deserves to be quoted in full: 陸生時時前說稱詩書。高帝罵之曰：「乃公居馬上而得之，安事詩書！」陸生曰：「居馬上得之，寧可以馬上治之乎？」 "Lù Jiǎ was constantly stepping forward and quoting the *Songs* and the *Documents*. Emperor Gāo (i.e. Liú Bāng) swore at him and said: 'I, your old man, have made it on horseback. Why should I care about the *Songs* and the *Documents*?' Lù Jiǎ replied: 'On horseback one may gain (the world), but can one govern

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<sup>11</sup> Lǚ Xùn 魯迅, *Kēxuéshǐjiào piān* 科學史教篇, *Lǚ Xùn quánjí* 魯迅全集 vol. XXX, p. 27. (My italics! I cheerfully continue to support Lǚ Xùn's comparatist open-mindedness which once upon a time encouraged scholarly *parrēsia* "free outspokenness", and which once upon a time enjoined us to pay fair and equal attention to the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the cultures we compare.) On matters of comparatist methodology, see also Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Millennium, A History of our Last Thousand Years*, who waxes enthusiastic about a "galactic perspective". There is much to quarrel about and to be irritated with in his book, but his technique of snapshot cross-cultural and global juxtaposition I find thoroughly entertaining, if not always enlightening.

<sup>12</sup> Liu2 Ba1ng was celebrated an important active participant in many of his campaigns. Not - as far as we know - in the flamboyant demonstrative style of Alexander, one hastens to add. But the fact remains that his military behaviour was very distinct from that of the First Emperor, of whom I have found no evidence of bloody hands-on battle experience.

(the world) on horseback?”<sup>13</sup>

Again, Jiǎ Yì 賈誼 (200-168 BC) gives the matter a more analytic turn in his much-quoted *dictum* from *Guò Qín lùn* 過秦論 “Faulting the Qín”: 取與守不同術。 “Gaining control of things and keeping control of things do not involve the same skills.”<sup>14</sup> There is no sense in which it was “on horseback” that the First Emperor conquered the empire. His was the sustained continuation of a military-cum-bureaucratic strategic campaign. Jiǎ Yì’s remark applies to the First Emperor, to Liú Bāng, and to Alexander in interestingly different ways.

By a characteristic act of almost blasphemous hubris the First Qín Emperor took the title of *huángdì* 皇帝 “Sovereign God” in 221 BC. By similar megalomaniac hubris Alexander declared himself son of Ammon/Zeus. Apparently Alexander became the first Greek to be given the honorific epithet *The Great*, but this first happened long after his death, around 200 BC.

Both men were aristocrats engaged in a huge military *tour de force*. Both came to control vast empires. Both failed in their attempts to establish lasting dynasties. One was a military adventurer who died young, the other a military strategist who lived to a ripe age.<sup>15</sup>

In 336 BC, Alexander was recognised as *hēgemōn autokratōr* of all the Hellenes against all the barbarians. He was the leader of the common Hellenic front against the Persian foes. In 221 BC, the First Qín Emperor declared himself *huángdì* 皇帝 "Sovereign God" of all under Heaven (and as mentioned before certainly not of Qín or of China proper only). Possible Central Asian influences on the mausoleum of the First Emperor appear to be many and varied, including the use of large public statuary. (And as we have noted in note 3, this influence may even have gone beyond the realm of Qín influence.) However, we do NOT have any of the public large bronze monumental statuary that is said to have existed. And the juxtaposition of Greek public statuary with “invisible” underground funerary statuary that was not at all for display seems historically misleading.

In any case, there are many historically crucial differences: Alexander's empire disintegrated politically and administratively even before he died: the organisation and even the boundaries of Alexander's empire proved ephemeral. The First Qín Emperor founded a dynasty which ended abruptly soon after his death, but he founded an empire the boundaries of which proved much more stable, although the borders did change through the ages. The dynasties which succeeded that short dynasty of the First Qín Emperor at the end of the third century BC were indeed inheritors of that unified empire which in turn had been created and united by that much maligned man, the First Qín Emperor. Alexander the Great came to be a youthful romantic hero. The First Qín Emperor became revered and maligned as the founder of one of the most

<sup>13</sup> *Shǐjì* 97, ed. Wáng Lìqì p. 2123.

<sup>14</sup> *Shǐjì* 6, ed. Wáng Lìqì p. 142. See Qí Yùzhāng p. 41, note 4.

<sup>15</sup> The First Hàn Emperor, Liú Bāng, was an upstart without any aristocratic pedigree.

discontinuously stable state institutions in world history.<sup>16</sup>

And yet, Chinese historiography, including the *Shǐjì*, does take the liberty to raise the question of his fatherhood. The First Emperor was said to be the son King Zhuāngxiāng of Qín 秦莊襄王 (281-247 BC) by a concubine of one of his cronies, a rich merchant by the name of Lǚ Bùwéi 呂不韋 (ca. 290 - 235 BC). There certainly were those who suspected that he was in fact the son of Lǚ Bùwéi. This much one gathers from some asides in the *Shǐjì*. Indeed, the account of Lǚ Bùwéi in the *Shǐjì* must count as wantonly prurient by Chinese historiographic standards. A good example of his *hào qí* 好奇 “penchant for the extraordinary”.

The First Emperor's father, that King Zhuāngxiāng of Qín, appears to have been dominated (and perhaps also cuckolded) by his cronies from the time of his youth when he had been State Hostage of Qín in the state of Zhào 趙, especially by Lǚ Bùwéi, who became the Prime Minister, and the remarkable profligate Lǎoǎi 嫪毐 who openly maintained illegitimate sexual relations with - among others - the Queen herself and who derived considerable profit from this relation. The *Shǐjì* is frank enough to allude to all these matters of personal interest.

In the case of the First Emperor of the Hàn Dynasty, the *Shǐjì* is significantly more generous with personal detail both about his youthful escapades and about the complex process by which he rose to the throne. Thus, from this particular point of view it is in a way more promising to compare in detail the literary lives of Alexander and Liú Bāng.

I shall now turn to my main concern: the contrasting traditions of artistic and literary portraiture in ancient China and in the Graeco-Roman tradition. And here is a representation of the First Qín Emperor as he is being attacked unsuccessfully by Jīng Kē 荊軻:



<sup>16</sup> See Li Yuning, ed., *The Politics of Historiography: The First Emperor of China* (1975), pp. xvi-xvii.

The various representations of this event in shrines and from tombs all date from 400 years after the event. Their purpose is narrative. Persons are depicted as part of an episode. There is no *ekphrasis* which detaches these persons from the narrative context, abstracts from all such contexts, and focusses on character portraiture as such. Lothar Ledderose has kindly suggested to me that the artistic institution of personal portraiture simply did not exist at the time of the First Emperor. Falkenhausen 2011: 57 goes even further and does not flinch from an audacious generalisation: “In great contrast to all other known early civilisations in both the Old and New Worlds, the Shang and Zhou core area is notable for the complete absence, down to the onset of the Imperial epoch, of any depiction of important human beings.” I cannot claim to have examined all known early civilisations. But the general point would remain interesting even if some other old civilisations were to prove as reticent regarding portraiture as the ancient Chinese traditions.

The type of posthumous portraiture that we do have at least by early Hàn times is well illustrated in the following funeral group portrait from Mǎwángduī 馬王堆, dated soon after 168 BC:



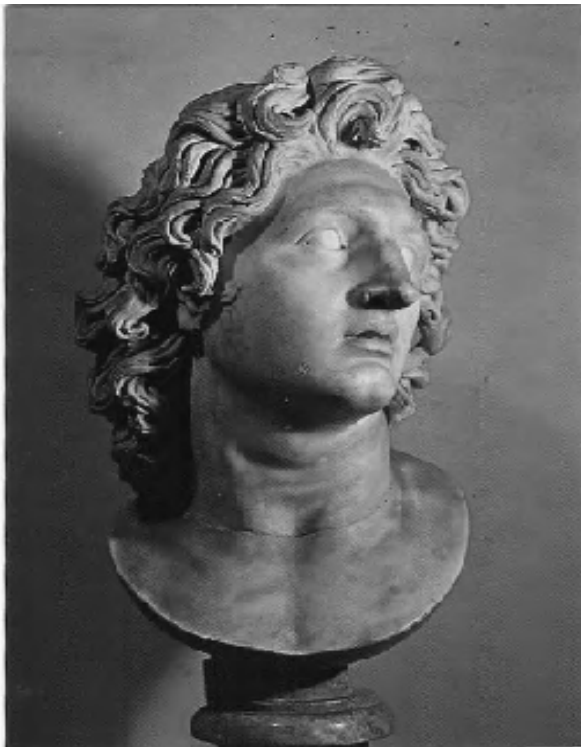
This contrasts with the standard hieratic representation of the face in Shāng times:



*Hédà fāngdǐng* 禾大方鼎. For rich details on this important piece see Lothar von Falkenhausen 2011: 57.



## I. PHYSICAL ARTISTIC PORTRAITURE



The vision here is that of a romantic young *âme sensible*, a sensitive soul. And at times we even have an awkward touch of bashful apprehension quite inappropriate for a conqueror of the world:





Alexander with his wife Roxane (Pompeii)





Getty Alexander, reportedly from Megara. Ca. 3225-320 BC, Malibu





Both Alexander and his colourful mother Olympias appear on coins. (Stewart 1993: 280-7)



Red cornelian gemstone with Alexander holding a thunderbolt, inscribed "Neisou." Ca. 300-250 B.C. St. Petersburg. (Stewart 1993: 280-7), to be compared with Pericles (Roman copy of an original ca. 425 BC, Stewart 1993: 509).

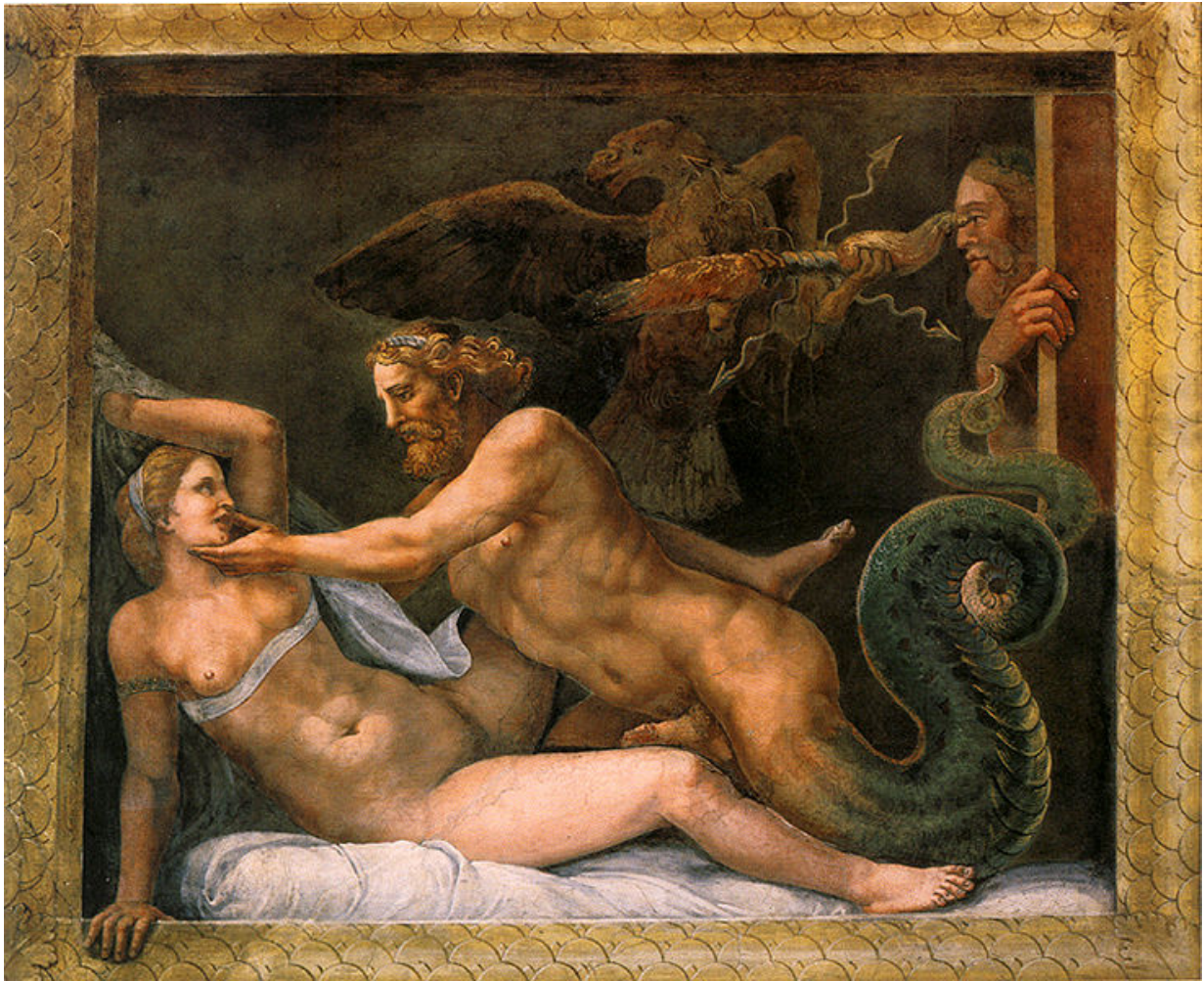
Among the issues widely discussed concerning Alexander was the question whether or not he was what today we would call “sexy”. Ancient as well as modern judgments on this issue diverge. What matters is the indisputable fact that the bodily beauty (as opposed to imposing facial expression or sheer size etc) were part of the self-image projected in Alexander’s time. His *souci de soi*, as Michel Foucault would put it, involved concern with his physical body, limbs, trunk and all. *Souci de soi* was *souci du corps*. The body was taken to be more than just expressive of an all-important invisible inner self.<sup>17</sup> Physical as well as literary portraiture reflected this. The cultural contrast between ancient Greece and ancient China in this regard runs deep and continues to run deep.

There is no portrait anywhere in traditional China of the mother of the First Emperor (or indeed of the mother of Liú Bāng. Alexander’s mother Olympias, on the other hand, has aroused considerable interest among traditional painters, as for example the famous Fresco by Giulio Romano dating from between 1526 and 1534, in Palazzo del Te, Mantua, of Olympias being

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<sup>17</sup> The much-proclaimed ugliness of Socrates was in an important sense *revolutionary* in the ancient Greek context. But that is a very different story from that of Alexander.

seduced (today we would hasten to say: raped) by Zeus himself:



This early 16th century fresco may seem irrelevant to our study of early portraiture, but in fact it brings out a difference in narrative perspective that goes back very much to ancient times, and in particular to Greek Vase Painting.<sup>18</sup>

As one tries to study and compare these two great kings, one finds oneself studying portraits of them, portraits in the written literature, historical portraits, sometimes painted portraits, occasionally minted portraits and so on. And I find the contrastive traditions of portraiture historically significant. David Keightley summarises: “Characteristically, there is no visual image or even textual description of any Chinese ruler or deity to compare with the images and descriptions of particular rulers, heroes, and gods we have from Mesopotamia or Greece. There is no Chinese equivalent to the bronze head which may depict King Sargon the Great, no

<sup>18</sup> I take this opportunity to draw attention to the outstanding volume Erika Simon 1981. For a systematic historical documentation of the wealth of ornamental and especially representational early developments see the authoritative Boardman 1998. Beazley 1956, dry as it is on every one of its 851 pages, gives an impressive survey of the considerable number of black vase painters, black vase schools, and black vase representational themes identified already in his time. One would like to see a similar comprehensive list of representational artists (named or unnamed) from pre-Qín China to compare with this in detail.

Chinese version of a heroic, life-size naked bronze Poseidon. In the Neolithic, the Shang, and the Western Chou the iconographic tradition was, with few exceptions, profoundly non-naturalistic. Gombrich's formula 'making comes before matching,' was not only true of the designs painted on Chinese Neolithic pots but continued to be true until relatively late in the Bronze Age."<sup>19</sup>

We have over one hundred monumental sculpted portraits of Alexander, and the study of these, together with the less monumental miniature portraits on coins and the like, has formed the basis of a whole little industry, that of Alexander iconography. M. Bieber, *Alexander the Great in Greek and Roman Art*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964 traces the portraits and even tries to relate these portraits to different stages in the life of Alexander.<sup>20</sup> Karl Dahmen, *The Legend of Alexander the Great on Greek and Roman Coins*, London: Routledge, 2007 provides a magisterial analysis of a large array of coins with a wide variety of relief representations of Alexander. Perhaps the liveliest survey remains Andrew Stewart 1994.<sup>21</sup> The pictorial material that survives is vast. Even the name and career of Alexander's favourite portraitist from his youth onwards, Lysippos, is well attested in anecdotes.<sup>22</sup> The Chinese were much impressed by coins from their "Western Regions". They may have found images in Western coins. But they certainly maintained in their own coins a hole at the centre of their own round metal currency.<sup>23</sup> In China no individuals of any kind were celebrated by images on coins, although this tradition was not entirely unheard of.<sup>24</sup>

Now compare the portraiture of the First Emperor in China.<sup>25</sup> We have no portrait dedicated to

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<sup>19</sup> Paul S. Ropp ed., *Heritage of China. Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilisation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, p. 37. It is this in some ways refreshingly unguarded and outspoken paper by David Keightley as well as the many unforgettable conversations about its subject over the years that has been invaluable to the present paper - and the present author.

<sup>20</sup> Lothar Ledderose has kindly drawn my attention to Tonio Hölscher 1973 and the singularly thoughtful Tonio Hölscher 2009. See Reinsberg 2005.

<sup>21</sup> I take this opportunity to thank Tonio Hölscher for drawing my attention to the importance of this work with its extraordinarily rich gallery of Alexander-related portraiture on pages 509-576 and the extraordinarily instructive bilingual documentation on Alexander's personal appearance on pages 341-359.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Zanker 1996 shows vividly a common Greek passion for individual personal characterisation of a psychological kind which is radically less common in Chinese art. Compare also in particular G.M.A. Richter 1967, with its supplement volume published in 1972. (Compare now Vincent Levèvre 2011.) Later Chinese portraiture as studied in Audrey Spiro 1990 and H. Brinker 1973 provide ample material for a more general comparative study of psychological characterisation in Chinese artistic portraiture.

<sup>23</sup> A.F.P. Hulswé 1979, p. 105f. I would like to thank Rudolf G. Wagner for drawing my attention to this important reference.

<sup>24</sup> See *Hànshū* 漢書 96A, p. 11A.

<sup>25</sup> On the background, Barnhart 1999:330 writes: "While sculptured images of human figures and faces have an ancient, if discontinuous, sporadic history going back to the Neolithic age, there is no coherent tradition of human imagery in China before the Warring States period. And



him. And even as he is faced with an assassination attempt on the walls of a shrine his image shows no personal character or momentary emotion. It is concerned with action, not with image.<sup>26</sup>

However, most striking evidence is being presented to us that Chinese sculpturers were capable of producing remarkably realistic and subtly distinct personal head portraits on completely undeveloped bodies.<sup>27</sup> Burial pottery figurines *táo yǒng* 陶俑 found in the underground ramp to the burial chamber of Emperor Jǐng of the Hàn 漢景帝 (r. 157-141 BCE) at Yánglíng 陽陵, near present-day Xi'an have been photographed - after restoration- like this:



The treatment of body in all these figures contrasts interestingly with that of the head and face of the same statuary. It contrasts even more strikingly with that in Greek or Roman sculpture, as could be illustrated from thousands of objects. I choose a light-hearted and characteristically sensuous Roman example, the well-known Slipper Slapper Group Slipper-slapper from Delos, ca 100 BC. The group consists of Aphrodite, Pan and Eros. In this way I try to illustrate the essential underlying link I see between playful body-focussed sensuousness on the one hand

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then what we find are mainly images of foreign peoples, "barbarians," who are presented to us as miniature jugglers, musicians, and other entertainers, or as slaves holding up tables, lamps, and bell racks."

<sup>26</sup> For a rich historical perspective on this distinction see Lothar von Falkenhausen 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Barnhart 1998: 330 writes with triumphalist enthusiasm: "It is noteworthy that Chinese art historians and archaeologists can and do now place early Chinese sculpture - as defined virtually exclusively by the recently discovered Qin terracotta figures - alongside that of Greece and Rome." He continues: "...we of course wish to celebrate the welcome elevation of Chinese sculpture into the glamorous company of Greece and Rome".

and empathetic physical portraiture on the other:<sup>28</sup>



The Slipper Slapper (height ca. 1.30 m), a 100 BC Hellenistic group sculpture commissioned by a wealthy Syrian merchant living on the island of Delos, now in the National Museum in Athens, is based on earlier sculptures of Aphrodite. Here she is seen defending herself with her sandal against goat-legged Pan. Eros flies above and grabs the horn of Pan. This is a light-hearted late example of a very ancient Greek artistic tradition of elaborating an interest in erotic physical beauty of gods as well as heroes. Such an interest is by no means absent in China, of course. But it is much less elaborated. Here as everywhere, contrasts tend to be less than

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<sup>28</sup> Illustration from Graham Zanker 2004, p. 20. I hasten to add that there was humorous and erotic sculpture in ancient China. But none of the rare examples we have has anything like the sensuousness and playful liveliness of this group.

absolute even when they are distinct and culturally important.<sup>29</sup>

The mysteriously original ancient Sānxīngduī 三星堆 culture of Sìchuān may be deemed irrelevant to the issue at hand, because the relation of that culture to Zhōu culture remains controversial and must in any case be said to be tenuous at best. However, that stunningly distinct culture shows a keen interest in bodies of animals and creatures of various kinds, as does ancient Zhōu art, but the physiology of the human body is not exactly celebrated in the most famous statue from Sānxīngduī:

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<sup>29</sup> And although these contrasts are not absolute, they do come in what I would call syndromes. Thus the contrastive history of the comic and the burlesque, and of graphic humor and caricature between China and Japan and then between China and Europe is a highly promising subject on which I have worked for a long time.



Also the characterisation of the head has a striking lack of just that human warmth which we found so exciting in the head portraiture of Alexander.











We do know that the emperor Wǔdì 武帝 (ca. 156 - 87 BC) of the Hàn took a great deal of interest in pictorial portraiture and ordered a portrait gallery to be made of worthies past and present. The idea of public portraiture was thus by no means alien to pre-Buddhist Chinese culture. It may even have been a highly valued part of that culture, although there is no evidence to support such a claim. But the portraits we do have of the First Emperor in Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine. The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989, like all other personal portraits in that book and elsewhere, show little interest in individualised facial expression or personal characterisation.

One notes that there was nothing monumental or public about those portraits buried in the Wu Liang shrine or in any of the Hàn dynasty tombs.

A survey of *Zhōngguó chuánshì rénwùhuà* 中國傳世人物畫<sup>30</sup> and the many handbooks of Chinese portraiture like Qū Guānqún 瞿冠群, *Zhōngguó lìdài míng rén tújiàn* 中國歷代名人圖鑑 (Shanghai: Shànghǎishūhuà chūbǎnshè, 1987) do nothing to change one's assessment of the

<sup>30</sup> 3 vols. Beijing: Beijingchubanshe, 2004. Seckel 1993 gives a fine introduction to the early history of portraiture that is particularly useful to our present purposes, and his late work Seckel 1997-99 provides rich documentation of the history, *longue durée*.

more general situation: one finds very little by way of psychologically ambitious realistic likenesses of individuals by contemporary artists in pre-Buddhist China.<sup>31</sup>

There was also no common practice of exhibiting portraits of living heroes or emperors in the major cities of China. Personality cult through monumental portraiture or sculpture in ancient Greece and modern China did have a few isolated striking parallels in pre-Buddhist China, but by all accounts it was far from pervasive in the cultural landscape. By all accounts, it was first introduced in China by the First Emperor.<sup>32</sup>

The sight of ancient pictorial representations was not unheard of in ancient China. The *Jiāyǔ* 家語 which contains much early material in spite of the fact that it is a late compilation, gives a revealing audience perspective on such portraiture:

孔子觀乎明堂，觀四門墉有堯舜與桀紂之象，而各有善惡之狀、興廢之誠焉...孔子徘徊而望之，謂從者曰：「此周公所以盛也。夫明鏡所以察形，往古者所以知今。『When Confucius was surveying the Hall of Light, he noticed that at the four gates on the city walls there were portraits of Yáo and Shùn and of Jié and Zhòu, and each had their good versus bad appearances, serving as warning of rise and fall... Confucius dwelt on these, looked at them, and told his followers: ‘This is how the duke of Zhōu thrived. The bright mirror is a means to investigate shape, and through the past one understands the present....’’ (*Kǒngzǐ Jiāyǔ* 孔子家語 ch. 11 *Guān Zhōu* 觀周)

The perspective is essentially one of political appraisal rather than a perspective of personal appreciation.

The *Hànshū* very much suggests a similar moralising rather than personal perspective:

觀古圖畫，賢聖之君皆有名臣在側，三代末主乃有嬖女。

"When I look at the old pictures there are always famous ministers by the side of talented and sagely rulers. On the other hand there were serving women near the last rulers of the three dynasties." *Hànshū* 漢書 97B.3983-3984

And yet the quite general lively interest in the individual in Greece and in Rome manifests itself in many unique ways. The art of individual portraiture not only of important figures such as Alexander the Great was not only widely practised but also widely celebrated throughout

<sup>31</sup> Compare also Audrey Spiro, *Contemplating the Ancients. Aesthetic and Social Issues in Early Chinese Portraiture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and even H. Brinker, *Die Zen-Buddhistische Bildnismalerei in China und Japan* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1973). For a more general perspective on portraiture in East Asia see Dietrich Seckel, *Das Porträt in Ostasien*. 3 vols., Heidelberg: C. Winter 1997–1999. Of specific interest in the present context is the earlier Seckel 1993 which provides excellent illustrations in figs. 1-16.

<sup>32</sup> See Nickel 2004.



Greece. Consider the publication, in 40 B.C, of a work on Greek portraiture by Varro (116 - 27 BC) entitled *Hebdomades, vel de imaginibus*, which dealt in detail with 700 Greek portraits from Homer-portraits down, with comments on each portrait. The book was widely copied and widely used in the centuries following its publication. Unfortunately, no copy has survived. We have only scattered and isolated examples.<sup>33</sup> What matters to us is that the genre of *Imagines* as such was popular. It is reported that Cicero's publisher and rich friend Atticus<sup>34</sup> compiled and "published" a similar large scale work celebrating the appearances of celebrities.

One feels sure that Sīmǎ Qiān, for one, would have loved to have and to comment on such an anthology of portraits of famous men. There is neat evidence to support this speculation:

余以為其人計魁梧奇偉。至見其圖，狀貌如婦人好女。蓋孔子曰：以貌取人，失之子羽。留侯亦云。

"I thought that the man - one presumes<sup>35</sup> - was a giant and a marvellously imposing sight. When I saw his picture, his appearance was like that of a woman or a beautiful girl. In fact, Confucius said: 'When you judge people by their appearance you miss out in the case of Zǐ Yǔ.' Of the Earl of Liú one must said the same thing."<sup>36</sup> *Shǐjì* 史記 55.30, ed. Wáng Lìqì p. 1528

The passage is fascinating for the personal, almost intimate, style in which Sīmǎ Qiān admits that his expectations were mistaken. It is also important as evidence that Sīmǎ Qiān felt he had available to him individual portraits and was interested in them in connection with the culturally important practice of *xiàng rén* 相人 "physiognomy". Here, as everywhere else, we have no absolute cultural contrasts between China and Rome. But it does seem significant that no artists whose work has come down to us seem to convey any personal and individual idea of what men like Confucius or the First Qín Emperor looked like, whereas the portraits of Socrates and scores of ancient Greeks that we have manage to create an illusion that we might recognise the man today, if we met him in the street. The sculptures we have were clearly

<sup>33</sup> Guillaume Rouillé's (c.1518–1589) *Promptuarii iconum insigniorum à seculo hominum, subiectis eorum vitis, per compendium ex probatissimis autoribus desumptis* (First and second parts, 1553/4) does perhaps give us some rough idea of its famous larger predecessor.

<sup>34</sup> Titus Pomponius Atticus, born Titus Pomponius (112/109 BC – 35/32 BC). Cornelius Nepos 18.5-6 reports that Atticus added short historical comments on an edition of *Imagines*. Apparently these were published as a separate volume. Compare also Pliny, *Natural History* XXXV 11 and Pauly-Wissowa 1894-1980, Supplement vol. 8, p. 523f.

<sup>35</sup>Note the almost parenthetic use of the verb *jì* 計 "reckon, calculate" to mean " - one reckons: presumably - " in this passage. When Sīmǎ Qiān enters the personal realm he is naturally tempted into quasi-parenthetic modes. Táng Zhēn 唐鎮 (1630 - 1704) uses the word *jù* 懼 in this way to mean " - I'm afraid - " in *Qiánshū* 潛書 (ed. Chéngdū: Sìchuánchūbǎnshè, 1984) p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> He looked innocent but was a crafty villain. (It is a pleasure to thank Hans van Ess for correcting me on this point.)

intended as individual and often intimate psychological portraits.<sup>37</sup> The conventional iconography for Confucius of a later date, which we do have, never seems to have or even aim for that individualised personal touch.

The individualised sculpture portraits in the tomb of the First Qín Emperor are not psychological portraits of named individuals expressive of their unique personality, although they do show that the Chinese at this stage were perfectly able to make convincing varied portraits. However, detailed research suggests that all these portraits are made up of standard modules. They are built up out of standardised components with a limited set of well-defined variations.<sup>38</sup>

Very little personal individuality survives in the form of sculpted portraits of well-known individuals from pre-Buddhist China. To be sure: such portraits may have existed, for all we know. We may just have a failure of transmission. But then even that failure of transmission in itself remains significant: it seems culturally and sociologically important that while any respectable Roman garden had its array of individualised portraits of cultural and political heroes, there was no such extensive cultivation of the individual physiognomy in ancient Chinese private horticulture. Much of the ancient Roman sculpture we have does come from private gardens. The absence of this cultivation of private gardens is the reason why not so many portraits from ancient China have come down to us.

In *Hànshū Yìwénzhì* 漢書，藝文志 we do find a book on portraiture of the disciples of Confucius: *Kǒngzǐ túrén túfǎ* 孔子徒人圖法, in two scrolls, juàn 卷. (ed. Wáng Xiānqiān 1. 875; ed. Gǔ Shǐ 古史 p. 72) It is not unreasonable to assume, with the traditional view, that these portraits were wall paintings. The various published versions of the three shrines of the

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<sup>37</sup>The question whether they are reliable historical evidence on what the portrayed people looked like is a complex question the answer to which will differ from case to case. However, these differing answers do not matter to my present argument.

<sup>38</sup>Thus Chinese archeologists have identified exactly two types of feet modules, two leg modules, eight torso modules and eight different head modules. To these hair, eyebrows, noses, lips ears and beards were added by individual modeling. In addition there was a certain amount of re-working of the basic head types. Particularly striking was the case of the hands of which there were exactly two module types: the folded which can hold implements or weapons and the unfolded, both of which were inserted into the open sleeves. Variation in hands is achieved through the varying angle in which the separate standard module of the thumb is added to the rest of the hand. The overwhelming variation between the statues is a well-defined variation within a strictly defined modular system. As Chinese archeologists have long pointed out, we have no portraiture here. There is not individuation but modular differentiation. Lothar Ledderose, in his 1992 Slade Lectures in the University of Cambridge, has placed this modular technique in the wider context of Chinese art history. Ladislav Kesner 1995 presents a splendidly illustrated and entirely convincing case against the interpretation of the statuary of the First Emperor as personal portraiture. See also Erdberg, Eleanor von, 'Die Soldaten Shih Huang Ti's – Porträts?', in *Das Bildnis in der Kunst des Orients*, Franz Steiner, Stuttgart, 1990 for discussion.

Wú family of later Han times will give one a reasonably clear idea of the sorts of portraits involved. Wu Hung's monograph *The Wu Liang Shrine* contains no portrait of any person that shows any serious concern to portray characteristic individual features beyond iconographic symbols.

Cáo Zhí 曹植 (A.D. 192- 232) does report that an emperor, looking at a picture of a stately lady, teases his empress:

帝指之戲后曰：恨不得如此人為妃。

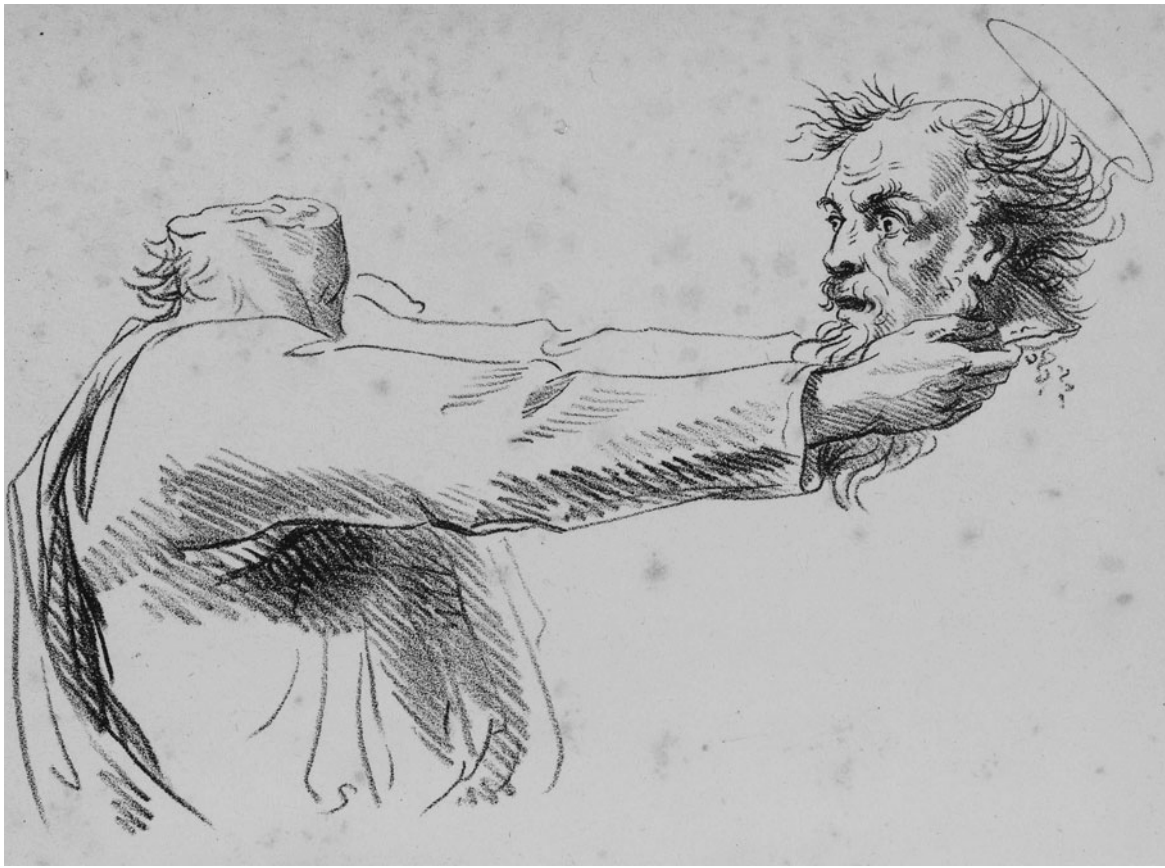
"The emperor pointed at the picture and said, teasing the empress: I wish I had such a person as a consort."<sup>39</sup>

This does imply striking beauty of the representation. But it says nothing about any individual characterisation or likeness of a known person.

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<sup>39</sup>*Huàzàn xù* 畫贊序, ed. J. P. Diény, *Concordance des oeuvres complètes de Cao Zhi* (Paris: Collège de France, 1977) p. 144.

**A Note on Self-Portraits and Literary Self-Construal through Reading**



William Beckford, *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters*, London: R. Bentley, 1834 (first ed. 1780), frontispice



Rosalind Crone Shafquat Towheed, eds., *The History of Reading, Volume 3 Methods, Strategies, Tactics*, London: Palgrave, 2008, Book cover illustration.

Cultures differ in terms of which elaborate traditions of making self-portraits and who do not. They differ in terms of how many people made self-portraits. And above all they differ in terms of the expressive ambitions, the artistic aspirations and the mimetic realism of the self-portraits that have come down to us from these traditions. In Tāng Xiǎnzǔ's 湯顯祖 (1550-1616) drama *The Peony Pavilion*, a self-portrait painting of the heroine is crucial to the story. My question concerns the early history of such self-portraiture.<sup>40</sup>

Many humans live their lives to project an image of themselves, to deserve a portrait made of themselves. Some of these literally make images of themselves, physical as well as literary “autobiographic” portraits. Within the field of physical portraiture, self-portraits hold a special interest for the comparative study historical reflexivity in Greece and Rome versus China. Plutarch mentions that the ancient Greek sculptor Phidias (ca. 480 – 430 BC) had included a

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<sup>40</sup> For the history of Chinese portraiture 1600-1900 see Richard Vinograd 1992.



likeness of himself in a number of characters in the "Battle of the Amazons" on the Parthenon, and there are classical references to painted self-portraits, none of which have survived. For intriguing reports of Greek self-portraits in sculpture of extraordinary verisimilitude from the 6th century BC see Pliny, *Natural History* XXXIV.83 (Theodoros, son of Thelekles, who flourished around 550-530 BC if we are to believe Herodotos, was famous for many feats, among them a self-portrait, for which Pliny is the only source: "Theodorus, who made the Labyrinth at Samos, cast a portrait of himself in bronze. Besides its remarkable fame as a likeness, it is celebrated for its great finesse; the right hand holds a file, and the three fingers of the left a little chariot and four, but this has been taken away to the Praeneste as a marvel of miniaturization: if it were reproduced in a drawing, together with its charioteer, the fly which Theodorus made at the same time would cover it with its wings." We have good reason to doubt the claim to extreme likeness here, but much less reason to doubt the bronze-casting detail in this report. Pausanias VIII 53.8 is said to have mentioned another such case but I have not been able to verify this reference so far.

Ancient Chinese portraits, like indeed many pre-Hàn books, tended to be posthumous products. But there are exceptions: Zhào Qí 趙歧 (died A.D. 201) produced images of himself as well as of four of his heroes for use on his tomb.<sup>41</sup> Many rubbings from Eastern Han tombs give us a pretty good idea of what these portraits (accompanied by *zàn* 讚 "encomia") might have been like.

Self-portraiture has a strikingly different history in China and in Western Europe. The difference - here as so often elsewhere - is not one of absence here versus presence there. The radical nature of the difference comes out in the radically different public functions of self-portraiture on the one hand, and in the degree of their ambition in the direction of "realism" that has been so much the focus of attention in the work of Ernst Gombrich.

Literary self-portraits, or psychologising autobiographic writing is well-known in China from the *Analects* onwards: "... down to Sīmǎ Qiān's quite possibly genuine autobiographic letter to Rèn Ān 任安. There is no absence of autobiographic reflection in ancient China, and certainly there is a preponderance of autobiographic self-portraiture in Chinese lyrical poetry in particular. But when one compares Georg Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie*, vol. 1: *Das Altertum*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1907, which deals with autobiographical works down to Augustine's *Confessiones* in no less than 477 pages, a contrast with the Chinese tradition becomes manifest: The *Confessions* are much longer than any traditional Chinese work: one does not have to refer to such major events in English autobiography as that of Samuel Pepys (1633 – 1703) to demonstrate this striking quantitative contrast which is important enough in itself. But even more significantly, there is a distinctly more sustained psychological detail in Augustine's *Confessiones* alone than there is in any pre-Opium war Chinese autobiographic work discussed in Wolfgang Bauer 1990, 928 pages. I dare not draw any comparisons with

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Nylan kindly drew my attention to this episode mentioned at the very end of *Hòu Hànsū* 後漢書 ch. 54.

Samuel Pepys's exceptional autobiography in ten volumes plus index volume (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1970-83).

In all this, the “Freudian” underlying pattern we saw when comparing physical self-portraits repeats itself: one’s potential psychologising autobiographic self-portrait, after St. Augustine, became almost something one projected as an image to live up to. J. Lenore Wright, *The Philosopher’s “I”: Autobiography and the Search for the Self* puts this very well in her chapter heading “Writing the Examined Life”. The life of an intellectual, a person aspiring to be an examined life in the spirit of Socrates (“The unexamined life is not a life.”), came to be seen as an “autobiographically examined life” even by those who did not actually write autobiographies. And, I have to report that from all reports I have seen of Alexander, it seems very much as if he was such an intellectual imbued with the spirit of Socrates, long before the time of Augustine. He saw himself very much as living “an examined life that IS a life”. Examples to demonstrate this abound throughout the reports of those who seem to have known Alexander well. And Alexander was, after all, a student of none less than Aristotle, grand-disciple of Socrates.

## II. LITERARY PORTRAITS: *EKPHRASIS* OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISATION

然而非書則無記載，非畫則無彰施，斯二者其亦殊途而同歸乎！吾故曰：書與畫非異道也，其初一致也。<sup>42</sup>

Plutarch tells us in what must count as an *ekphrasis* of characterisation, the following, which I have to quote *in extenso* exactly to show how extensive it is:

"The outward appearance of Alexander is best represented by the statues of him which Lysippus made, and it was by this artist alone that Alexander himself thought it fit that he should be modelled. For those peculiarities which many of his successors and friends afterwards tried to imitate, namely, the poise of the neck, which was bent slightly to the left, and the melting lance of his eyes, this artist has accurately observed. Apelles, however, in painting him as wielder of the thunder-bolt, did not reproduce him as wielder of the thunder-bolt, did not reproduce his complexion, but made it too dark and swarthy. Whereas he was of a fair colour, as they say, and his fairness passed into ruddiness on his breast particularly, and in his face. Moreover, that a very pleasant odour exhaled from his skin and that there was a fragrance about his mouth and all his flesh, so that his garments were filled with it, this we have read in the Memoirs of Aristoxenus. Now, the cause of this, perhaps, was the temperament of his body, which was a very warm and fiery one; for fragrance is generated as Theophrastus thinks, where moist humours are acted upon by heat. ... And in Alexander's case, it was the heat

<sup>42</sup> Sòng Lián 宋濂, *Huà yuán* 畫原 (ca. AD 1370) in 中國畫論類編 Peking: Renminmeishu Chubanshe, 1986 (first ed. 1957), vol. 1, p. 95.

of his body, as it would seem, which made him prone to drink, and choleric." (Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* p. 233)

From the hand of Lysippus, we are told, there was even a portrait of the youthful Alexander which constituted an artistic elaboration of the aspect of psychological and physical personal development. It appears the famous tilt of the head in so many portraits of Alexander was a feature introduced by Lysippus.

No such idiosyncrasies are reported in any iconography of the First Emperor, certainly. As for the First Emperor, pictorial portraits of him are in any case unattested in pre-Buddhist times. (Bertold Laufer 1912 explores the history of Confucius-portraits, which do go further back.) What mattered to the ancient Chinese, it might seem, was less the personality, appearance, idiosyncrasies, or even the athletic prowess of the First Emperor: the interest was in his military and then political prowess and achievements. Achievements were the main concern. Individual character was secondary. His relations to his wives and concubines were beyond the horizon of recommended attention.

This difference in the portraiting of our two heroic leaders is worth thinking about in a broader literary context. Remember Plutarch: *oute gar historias grafomen, alla bious*. ... "For we do not write histories, but lives (*bious*), and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities. Accordingly, just as painters get the likenesses in their portraits from the face and the expression of the eyes, wherein the character shows itself, but make little account of the other parts of the body, so I must be permitted to devote myself rather to the signs of the soul in men, and by means of these to portray the life of each, leaving to others the description of their great contests." (*Life of Alexander*, p. 225)

For the First Emperor of the Qín Dynasty, Sīmǎ Qiān gives us pretty exactly an array of sieges of capitals and wars of attrition where ten thousands fell. All this comes at the expense of psychological characterisation. And it would be quite wrong to generalise from this one case. The biography of Liú Bāng does indeed explore not only the psychological formation of the youth, his marriage as a young man, and his rise to the throne, but also the psychologically complex story of his conduct of public affairs as the Emperor. So the appropriate comparison of Alexander's life is not with that of the First Qín Emperor, but with the First Hàn Emperor.

Everything in the personal introduction of Liú Bāng's biography is made directly related to his future career. Every single part of this introduction is directly aetiological, motivating and explaining the historical tale that unfolds in the rest of the chapter.

1. His mother made supernaturally pregnant in order to produce a supernaturally sanctioned Liú Bāng.

- 1.a His "father" witnessing the dragon above in order to bear witness to his supernatural origins.
2. His physical appearance, impressive nose, brow, beard, and seventy-two spots on the thigh visual signs of his extraordinary promise.
3. His humaneness, love of people, generosity etc., instrumental in his ability to make friends and win associates.
4. His refusal to engage in the humdrum family business demonstrating his high ambitions.
5. His passing the entrance examinations for a basic official career leading him to become intimate friends with everyone in his office, thus beginning to gain a following.
6. His jovial and strongly convivial sense for wine and for women (combined with the above-mentioned features) gaining him manifest material advantages (free wine to begin with, much more important political alliances afterwards).
7. When he sees the First Emperor his concrete high ambitions are awakened: "Why don't I try to become like that?"
8. When he meets the Lǚ 呂 clan, the outcome is not a love affair ending a marriage, but a marriage resulting in the birth of a son who would become the second male emperor of the Hàn.

The overall theme of the whole of ch. 8 is the pacification of the world, not the personality of Liú Bāng, as Wú Rǔlún 吳汝倫 (1840-1903) put it, aptly.<sup>43</sup> Sīmǎ Qiān's final personal comments on the subject of the chapter is indeed concerned with the historical rise of the Hàn empire, not with biographic history of the person Liú Bāng. In the end, even that fascinating person is of interest to Sīmǎ Qiān mainly insofar as that person had an interesting or important historical impact. The personality is important for the historical impact or function it has. There is no fascination for Liú Bāng "as such". Hence, there is not really a portrait of him as a person. This remains true in spite of the fact that in so many places elsewhere Sīmǎ Qiān does demonstrate his famous *hào qí* 好奇 "fondness for the extraordinary" even when what he finds extraordinary is historically inconsequential and a "mere curiosity" even from his own point of view.

Portraiture of the kind that interests me here arises when the focus is on appearance as expressive of essential personality and essential psychology "as such", as an aesthetic object deserving passionate attention in its own right. Translated into rhetoric this means that portraiture involves a special kind of *ekphrasis* in biography that shifts the focus from what serves the objective narrative to a consideration of the subjective personality "as such". This

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<sup>43</sup> For details see the useful appendix in Nienhauser, vol. II, 2012: 93.

*ekphrasis* typically topicalises and problematises the nature of the agent and the subjective sensibilities *behind* the actions and experiences that are the main stuff of biography.<sup>44</sup> The literary portrait thus not only describes what happened. It poses as an exploration of what it *felt* like to be the protagonist.

There is nothing in Sīmǎ Qiān's biographies of the First Emperor or of Liú Bāng that begins to address this central question of the sensibilities and subjectivities of these two important personalities. By contrast, Plutarch became famous for making just these sensibilities and subjectivities the main concern of his *Lives*.

Perhaps one has to turn to early Chinese historical drama-fiction, and to early narrative fiction, for a more psychology-orientated account of Liú Bāng.<sup>45</sup> Fictional entertainment is not the same as historiography, but one should not disregard the links between the two. Even Sīmǎ Qiān seems to write, on occasion, as an entertainer rather than as an historian.

Returning now to the historiographic and biographic accounts of the First Emperor, it is my impression that Sīmǎ Qiān's historicising objective focus persists in the Chinese historiographic tradition. I base this impression on Mǎ Fēibó 馬非百, *Qín Shǐhuángdì zhuàn* 秦始皇帝傳 "Transmissions concerning the First Qín Emperor" (Jiangsu: Jiangsugujichubanshe, 1985) which provides 648 pages of fine print, conveniently assembling traditional Chinese sources on the First Emperor dating from all ages down to the Qīng 清 dynasty. On the appearance and psychology of the First Qín Emperor there are exactly ten intensely repetitive lines.<sup>46</sup> Repetitive, in fact, of pretty exactly what we find in *Shǐjì*. However, one must add that some rudimentary psychological characterisation is achieved through description of personal-interest episodes. Characterisation is thus typically by narrative means, and without that passionate focus of portraiture, as I understand it. For good reason the First Qín Emperor is discussed in terms of the politics of historiography in Li Yu-ning 1975.

Even the anonymous *Qínshǐhuáng wàizhuàn* 秦始皇外傳 (declared to be an anonymous Yuan dynasty work in the promising collection 中國古代艷史, Peking: Tuánjiéchūbǎnshe, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 147-197) pays practically no attention to the subjectivity and personality of the First Emperor, as far as I can see.

<sup>44</sup> For a convenient survey of the uses of *ekphrasis* in ancient literature see Ruth Webb 2009. Even Homer is rich in personal *ekphrasis*, notably Eurybates (*Odyssey* 19.246), Thersites (*Iliad* 2.217ff), along with such famous impersonal cases as that of the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18.

<sup>45</sup> See Wilt Idema's study "The Founding of the Han Dynasty in Early Drama: The Autocratic Suppression of Popular Debunking", in W. Idema and E. Zürcher eds., *Thought and Law in Qin and Han China. Studies Dedicated to Anthony Hulsewé on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday*, Leiden: Brill, 1990, pp. 183-207.

<sup>46</sup> Zhāng Dàkě et al. 2005, vol. 7 pp. 85-105 and 130-150 makes a valiant attempt to collect comments on the first Emperor, and also on Liú Bāng. But this quite useful work is still similarly disappointing on both personalities with regard to personal portraiture.

Only profoundly westernised modern works like Ān Zuòzhāng 安作璋 and Mèng Xiángcái 孟祥才 *Qínshǐhuángdì dàzhuàn* 秦始皇帝大傳 Peking: Zhōnghuáshūjū, 1995 and in the 1202 pages of Lǐ Yuē 李約, *Qínshǐhuáng dàzhuàn* 秦始皇大傳, Peking: Zhōngguówénxué chūbǎnshè, 1995 turn their attention to what it might have felt like to live the life of the First Emperor. In fact, I have found it quite difficult to put Lǐ Yuē's book down simply because as one peruses its freely vulgarising popular prose it invites a great deal of worthwhile psychological and historical reflection of the imaginative and often counterfactual sort that Mǎ Fēibó's hefty volume of historical sources certainly does not inspire.<sup>47</sup>

It is at this point that the biography of the First Emperor attempts any of the gossipy plausible psychological realism of the popular Roman biographer Suetonius, something of the problematising (often counterfactual and irreducibly ambivalent) character analysis of a Thucydides or a Tacitus, and sometimes even a whiff of the philosophical depth of Plutarch's analysis of the ambivalences and contingencies of the development of great human personalities.<sup>48</sup> F. Leo's pioneering work on the history of the inner dialogue in ancient Literature (*Der Monolog im Drama*, 1908, Reprint Kessinger 2010) is also of immense value for my efforts in the comparative study of biography because what the someone like Plutarch aims to capture in his biographies is exactly the kind of personality *as engaged in an inner dialogue with itself*. And the crucial importance of this reflexivity of the inner dialogue, incidentally, is nowhere celebrated more elegantly and more intensely than in Petrarca's *De solitudine*.<sup>49</sup>

Karl A.E. Enenkel 2007 has tried to argue, in congenial detail, that personal identity is an invention articulated through the medium of autobiography. I suspect that even before the reflexiveness of psychological autobiography, the medium of philosophical biography is also part of the constitution of personal identity. In philosophical biography one sees oneself in the mirror of other personal identities. It is in that context that Sīmǎ Qiān's biographies of the philosophers did play a very similar role to that of the intellectually orientated *Lives of Eminent*

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Wood, following in the footsteps of Alexander, had plenty of ancient sources to go back to as he vividly recreated his television portrait of this great enigmatic personality. Similar TV attempts to create portraits for the First Emperor, by contrast, must almost entirely rely on contemporary imagination and cannot have recourse to such ancient portraiture. (See Wood 2004 and the associated film which is available on YouTube.)

<sup>48</sup> I must mention two magisterial surveys of biography in classical times: Arnaldo Momigliano 1993 and Albrecht Dihle 1987, and in addition the entirely relevant I. Bruns 1898 as well as F. Leo 1901.

<sup>49</sup> See the splendid bilingual edition Pétrarque, *La vie solitaire (1346-1366)*, Préface de Nicholas Mann, Introduction, traduction et notes de Christophe Carraud, Paris: Jérôme Millon, 1999. Petrarca's obsession with self-construal is conveniently accessible in bilingual editions of much of the rest of his autobiographic works in the same series. For the present paper, Karl A.E. Enenkel 2007 has been an important inspiration.

*Philosophers of Diogenes Laertius (3rd century AD).*<sup>50</sup>

The reconstruction of the nuances in the Chinese analytic strategies deployed by the greatest of the Chinese historians throughout the ages in their analyses of the changing human personality and of personality development must in my view be based on meticulous Chinese conceptual history.

Take the very term *zhuàn* 傳 “transmission; tradition; account” as compared to “biography”. The aligned or lined-up accounts predominantly recount and explain achievements. They very rarely aspire to gain an understanding for what it felt like to be the person one is accounting for. His subjectivity may not be absent. But it is marginal. Plutarch’s term is *Bioi parallēloi* “Parallel Lives”. I note that ancient Greek has two words for life: *zōē* “the state of being alive rather than dead, vegetative life”, and *bios* “the life one leads, expresses oneself through, forms and is responsible for, cultural life”.

*bios biou deomenos ouk estin bios.*

"A life without life' is not a life". Menander, *Sententiae*<sup>51</sup>

And, as Socrates had it,

*ho de anexetastos bios ou biōtos anthrōpōi.* “But the unexamined life is not worth living for a person.” Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 38a

And that, exactly, is my unashamedly Socratic question: do Chinese biographies examine lives in the sense that Socrates is here demanding as fundamental?

The issue of what kind of *bios* one should lead was very much alive in China, but it was not couched in terms of *shēng* 生 “be born; be alive” or *huó* 活 “survive”, *cūn* 存 “subsist”. *Vitam agere* “to conduct one's own life, take responsibility for one's own life” is not a traditional pre-Buddhist Chinese notion. There was no such thing as a “life without life”: that was simply a contradiction in terms. When there is life, there is life. R. Joly's famous book *Le thème philosophique des genres de vie dans l'antiquité classique*, discusses an issue which would have taken very different form in pre-Buddhist China.

Writing about life would not make sense in pre-Buddhist terms. *Shēngyá* 生涯 describes the “span of life” which Zhuāngzǐ - quite reasonably - finds short. Private life is only of prurient interest: in fact unmentionable as such. Public achievement and public performance is what

<sup>50</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. [Note also the very fine collaborative annotated French edition *Vie et doctrines des philosophes illustres*, Paris: Livres de Poche, 1999.]

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Xī Kāng 嵇康 (A.D. 223 - 263), *Jiājiè* 家戒 (Family admonishments), beginning: 人無志非人也. “A person who has no mental orientation/aspiration is not a man.” The concept of man was so much focussed on that constructions of this sort are current.

counts and what is described in "biographies". There is no literary notion of private life versus public life in pre-Buddhist China. Consequently, biography is not the same thing in classical Greece and in pre-Buddhist China: there was no personal *bios* that deserved the main attention of a biographer. Life was predominantly about career for those people who had biographies in the first place. Personal character was interesting to the extent that it contributed to explaining that career, those successes and those failures.

Compare now Plutarch, introducing his biography of Alexander, who zeroes in on the essential contrast between the task of the historian and that of the biographer:

I am not engaged in writing history, but lives. It is not in the most conspicuous of a man's acts that good and bad qualities are necessarily best manifested. Some trivial act, a word, a jest often shows up character far more than engagements, with thousands of dead, or pitched battles or blockades. Painters get their resemblances of portrait with subject from the face and the parts round the eyes; that is where character shines out and so they pay little regard to the rest of the body. In the same way we must be allowed to penetrate into the manifestations of the soul and by their aid to create a picture of each individual life, leaving to others the great exploits and the struggles.<sup>52</sup>

In the preface to Timoleon<sup>53</sup> Plutarch discusses the use he does make of history, and indeed the history of his own method of writing lives - as well as the place of his biographic activity in the conduct of his own life:

ἐμοὶ τῆς τῶν βίων ἄψασθαι μὲν γραφῆς συνέβη δι' ἑτέρους, ἐπιμένειν δὲ καὶ φιλοχωρεῖν ἤδη καὶ δι' ἑμαυτόν, ὥσπερ ἐν ἐσόπτρῳ τῇ ἱστορίᾳ πειρώμενον ἀμῶς γέ πως κοσμεῖν καὶ ἀφομοιοῦν πρὸς τὰς ἐκείνων ἀρετὰς τὸν βίον. οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀλλ' ἢ συνδιαιτήσῃ καὶ συμβιώσῃ τὸ γινόμενον ἔοικεν, ὅταν ὥσπερ ἐπιξενούμενον ἕκαστον αὐτῶν ἐν μέρει διὰ τῆς ἱστορίας ὑποδεχόμενοι καὶ παραλαμβάνοντες ἀναθεωρῶμεν 'ὅσσοις ἔην οἴός τε,' τὰ κυριώτατα καὶ κάλλιστα πρὸς γνῶσιν ἀπὸ τῶν πράξεων λαμβάνοντες. φεῦ, φεῦ: τί τούτου χάριμα μείζον ἂν λάβοις, καὶ πρὸς ἐπανόρθωσιν ἠθῶν ἐνεργότερον;

To me the idea of writing lives has come through others;<sup>54</sup> it is my own resolve to continue in this field and to take up residence there. Using history as a mirror I try by whatever means I can to improve my own life and to model it by the standard of all that is best in those whose lives I write. As a result I feel as though I were conversing and indeed living with them; by means of history I receive each one of them in turn, welcome and entertain them as guests and consider

<sup>52</sup> See Barrow 1969: 53.

<sup>53</sup> My translation varies from that in the standard Loeb edition as well as from that in Barrow 1969, so I add the Greek for reference.

<sup>54</sup> For an authoritative survey of the history of the study of Greek biography see Momigliano 1993: 9ff.. William Roscoe Thayer has generalised in *The Art of Biography* (1920) p. 40: "From outward to inward — that is the direction which the Art of Biography has taken, and that is the direction which every true biographer should take." The open question is not only to what extent this generalisation is true in the West, but to what extent it applies at all in the case of China.



their stature and their qualities and select from their actions the most authoritative and the best with a view to getting to know them. Ah! Ah! What greater pleasure could one enjoy than this or what more efficacious in improving one's own character?<sup>55</sup>

Plutarch's discourse, here, is programmatic. There is doubt to what extent he really lived up to his programme. But of his intellectual aspirations described in these opening remarks there can be no doubt: he set out to write biographies in a philosophical spirit. And because he did this he became so influential when introduced to northern Europe by Jacques Amiot (1513-1593) in the 16th century. It was because he was seen to take a philosophical angle on the details of human life - and on his own life. Michel Montaigne (1533 – 1592) took the point. And Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) had not needed the help of any northern European translation to take the message.

And thus it is that the contrasting “biographies” discussed in this paper are based on profoundly and philosophically different kinds of portraiting sources and portraiting traditions. It is as if these lives, in China as in Greece, were lived with a view to fitting into just such deeply different portraiting traditions. Individuals have invented themselves - their selves, their lives - through the anticipated narrative of their biographies. From very early on, individuals have been living up to anticipated portraits of themselves - in more ways than one. In China as in Greece.

And I would like to conclude with an afterthought that might have motivated the present paper if I hadn't first discovered it after my manuscript was basically finished. Ladislav Kesner 1995: 132 concludes: “The Lishan necropolis is a metaphor for the person of the First Emperor himself.” Perhaps the Lìshān necropolis was designed as something like a posthumous *non-physiological*, metaphorical *mega*-self-portrait of a terrified and a terrifying megalomaniac. A metaphorical self-presentation in clay of his personality-in-context - to an imagined underworld of the dead. Hidden away from the living under a monumentally bare tumulus.

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<sup>55</sup> See Barrow 1969: 54.

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I have several remarks:

note 5: Qi did not have the status of a "duke" but just of a hou. I would like to have more on this. There is an article by Lothar von Falkenhausen who argues that "gong" was not a title and that "hou" was just a general description of all the "zhuhou" not matter which rank they held according to the Liji. I wonder what all this means. I think that Qi actual had the highest rank and that it was called "hou" in the way von Falkenhausen interprets "hou". Maybe I am wrong. PERHAPS NO NEED TO GO INTO MORE DETAIL WITH FALKENHAUSEN. CHEN PAN IS THE AUTHORITATIVE DOCUMENTATION. THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THE RULERS OF QI DID NOT HAVE THE FORMAL STATUS OF A GONG.