HONORIFIC VS. FUNERARY STATUES OF WOMEN:
ESSENTIALLY THE SAME OR FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT?

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Draped standing statues of women who were not members of the imperial family were, broadly speaking, erected in one of two contexts: honorific statues might be placed in one of the public areas of the town, and funerary statues would decorate a tomb or grave monument outside the town.¹ Were the same statue types used in both contexts, and did the commissioners and makers of the statues consider that the same virtues and ideals were appropriate to both? This question arose out of and relates to two other pieces of research: the first is Elizabeth Forbis' analysis of the content of honorific inscriptions for women as opposed to funerary epitaphs.² She noted that in Italy (in contrast to the Eastern parts of the Roman Empire) women honoured in public contexts were praised for their public roles and generosity but not for the domestic virtues which formed the usual areas for praise in funerary commemorative inscriptions. The second area of research is my own ongoing investigation of gender and body language in Roman art: this involves looking at the pose and gestures such statues of women employ, especially in contrast to the statues of men, and what this suggests about attitudes to women and their role in Roman society.³

¹ A third area where statues of women might be displayed is in the house or villa: Neudecker (1988) 74–84 discusses the display of private portraits in villas, but most of these are portraits of men, and the evidence he cites specifically for portraits of women is quite limited. Eck in this volume also considers the epigraphic evidence for the relative proportions of public and funerary honours to men and women in Italy, including statues commemorating them in villas and houses.
² Forbis (1990), especially 494–498.
³ See, for example, Davies (2005, 2008, 2010 and forthcoming). It is my contention that, for portrait statues in particular, the poses, dress and demeanour depicted would be those considered appropriate (even ideal) for the gender represented—such statues would thus act as role models for the rest of society. They do not necessarily show how men and women really behaved, but do express societal attitudes and expectations with regard to gender norms. Moreover, it has to be remembered that the women represented by the statues discussed here were by definition members of the most important families in their communities (or even from outside) and the social rules that applied to them were not the same as for ‘women’ in general, a point emphasised by Trimble (2011) 153–154, 190, when discussing the Large Herculaneum Woman type of statue.
Many of these statues conform to a specific statue body type (such as the so-called Pudicitia, Large and Small Herculaneum Women and so on), basic templates used by sculptors for the bodies of portrait statues. So the question I set myself was—were the body types used for statues of women in the two contexts (public and funerary) the same or different? And if there are differences, do they correlate in any way with the differences in the inscriptions observed by Forbis? It is noticeable that some of the body types (such as the Pudicitia and Large and Small Herculaneum Women) use more closed poses (see figs. 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11), with the arms held across the body and the figure tightly wrapped in drapery, suggesting a defensive and subordinate attitude, whereas others (such as the Ceres and Hip- and Shoulder-swathe types) are more open and use more expansive gestures, suggesting someone who takes a more active and leading role (see figs. 1, 4, 9 and 12). Might the former have been seen as more appropriate for the mothers, wives and daughters commemorated on their tombs, and the latter for wealthy patronesses and priestesses honoured with statues in the public areas of town centres?

For a database I used the impressive and extremely useful appendix 2 compiled by Annetta Alexandridis in her book on portraits of imperial women (empresses and other women related to the reigning emperor). This appendix lists statues of women—not just empresses, but other, non-imperial ‘real’ women and some ‘ideal’ subjects including goddesses—according to a number of standardised body types. There are nearly 1300 items in these lists divided into 26 types (some further subdivided into variants), which at first sight would seem to be a good basis for number crunching. But:

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4 For a more general discussion of such statues and the contexts in which they were used see Fejér (2008), especially Part 3, 331–372. For a detailed discussion and analysis of the replicated ‘sameness’ of one of these body types (the Large Herculaneum Woman) see Trimble (2011). An important question raised by Trimble’s discussion is the extent to which this statue type is typical of the other types used for portrait statues (my contention is that the ways in which the various types were used were not identical). Moreover, Trimble is primarily concerned with the examples of the type made in the second century AD: her emphasis on the honorific use of the Large Herculaneum Woman type is largely based on the preponderance of such a purpose for these statues in the Eastern empire in the second century. The situation looks rather different when only Western examples are considered. Trimble tends to downplay the ‘exceptions’ (including the funerary and imperial examples) in creating her picture of the typical standard use of the statue type as being for honorific display of non-imperial women in public contexts only.