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# SCRIPTA CLASSICA ISRAELICA

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# Undescribed Appearances in Classical Greek Politics

Peter B. Martin

*Abstract:* Classical Greek historians, biographers, and orators rarely described the appearance of individual public figures. By contrast, Homer depicted the looks of individuals, as did ancient historians, biographers, and orators after the Classical Greek era. This unusual silence about appearances in Classical Greek texts is perhaps connected to the undifferentiation of appearances in much of Classical Greek art. Arguing from visual and textual evidence, this paper seeks to describe and understand the disregard of appearances in Classical Greek politics.

*Keywords:* Greek Historiography, Roman Historiography, Visual Culture, Gestures and Body Language, Attic Oratory.

## INTRODUCTION

In one of his speeches, *On the Crown*, Demosthenes referred to the fact that he was being judged and seen (ἐγὼ κρίνωμαι καὶ θεωρῶμαι, 18.315), and yet in none of his speeches did Demosthenes describe the object being seen, his own appearance.<sup>1</sup> In his biography of Agesilaus, Xenophon wrote that Agesilaus delighted in always being visible to the public (*Agesilaus* 9.1), but Xenophon did not then write about what the public saw when they looked at Agesilaus. Many Classical Greek authors described the act of viewing but not the appearance of the public figures being viewed.<sup>2</sup>

This paper begins by noting that in Classical Greece, in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, historians, biographers, orators, and authors of rhetorical treatises paid little attention to appearances. These authors rarely portrayed static appearances—for instance, the size of someone’s head—or bodies in motion—for instance, the way someone frowned, or gestured when speaking.<sup>3</sup> In the genre of Classical Greek philosophy, people’s looks were described and the significance of these looks analysed and questioned, but outside of philosophy, almost no Classical Greek prose authors analysed the looks of individual public figures.<sup>4</sup>

In the next section of this paper, this eschewal of physical descriptions in Classical Greek prose is brought into relief by the fact that authors writing in the same genres but in later time periods did include such descriptions. So too, prior to the Classical Greek

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<sup>1</sup> On Dem. 18.315, see Goldhill (1999), 6.

<sup>2</sup> See O’Connell (2017) for references to the act of viewing in Attic oratory. For such references in Classical Greek historiography, see Hdt. 1.10.1–2; Thuc. 2.86.6, 6.88.3; Xen., *Hell.* 1.4.13.

<sup>3</sup> This paper examines explicit descriptions of appearances; for a different approach, see Boegehold (1999).

<sup>4</sup> This paper examines the appearances of politicians or other ‘public figures’, loosely defined; it does not examine the physical descriptions either of mythical figures, as found for instance in Greek tragedy, or of private individuals, as found in Hippocratic texts. This paper focuses on the appearance of individuals, not groups.

period, Homer had described the looks and gestures of individuals. Despite the widespread influence of Homer on Classical Greek culture, most Classical Greek authors did not adopt the Homeric propensity to depict the appearance of individuals and infer meaning from these outward signs. Within the ancient world, Classical Greece was the exception.<sup>5</sup>

In the final section, this paper situates the Classical Greek prose authors' silence about appearances within a wider visual culture. Analogous to the way in which Classical Greek authors tended to ignore appearances, Classical Greek artists rarely depicted statesmen, and when they did do so, they hardly differentiated between the appearance of one statesman and that of another. In Classical Greece, uniquely, political authority was not pictorially expressed. This paper concludes by offering explanations as to why this unusual visual culture existed and calling for a reassessment of the importance of appearances in Classical Greek politics.

#### APPEARANCES IN CLASSICAL GREECE

The Classical Greek historian Herodotus does depict an individual's body when that body is being harmed in some way. For instance, Herodotus writes that the Persian Zopyrus mutilated himself by cutting off his own nose and ears and shaving his head (3.154.2); and that the Athenian tyrant Hippias, when an old man, coughed so strongly that one of his teeth fell out (6.107.3). These passages are gruesome in their level of corporeal detail. However, outside of these descriptions of disfigurement, Herodotus either does not write about what an individual looked like, or writes about a person's looks in non-specific ways.<sup>6</sup>

Herodotus marks out some individuals, especially non-Greeks, as tall (μέγας) and beautiful (εὐειδής). These non-specific adjectives are paired to describe the Persian King Cyrus as a baby (1.112.1) and a daughter of the Pharaoh Apries (3.1.3), to give just two examples.<sup>7</sup> Herodotus sometimes specifies someone's height: a woman called Phye, who was dressed up as Athena, is described as beautiful and in size three fingers short of four cubits (1.60.4). However, Herodotus describes almost all other physical attributes imprecisely. He at times links non-specific physical attributes to political authority: he writes that among the whole Persian army there was no one, as regards looks and greatness (κάλλεός τε εἴνεκα καὶ μεγάθεος), worthier than Xerxes to hold this command (τοῦτο τὸ κράτος, 7.187.2).<sup>8</sup> However, Herodotus does not similarly find correspondences between the appearance and status of Greek statesmen.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Classical Athenian art and texts dominate the surviving Classical Greek sources. If more art, historiography, biography, and oratory had survived from other Classical Greek city-states, it would be easier to judge whether extrapolations from Athenian to Greek visual culture are warranted.

<sup>6</sup> Herodotus does describe in detail the clothing both of individuals and of ethnic groups. For a description of an individual's clothing, see, e.g., 1.152.1 on Pythennos' purple cloak. This paper investigates descriptions not of clothing but of physical—bodily and facial—features and actions.

<sup>7</sup> See also Hdt. 1.199, 3.3.1, 5.12.1, 5.56.1, 7.12.1.

<sup>8</sup> See Konstan (2014), 53 on the irony of this praise of Xerxes' beauty.

<sup>9</sup> See also Hdt. 3.20.2 on the Ethiopian method of choosing kings according to physical characteristics.

When describing groups of people, Herodotus does depict the appearance of the human body. He writes that those who live in the foothills past Scythia, both men and women, are said to be bald from birth, snub-nosed and have long beards (4.23.2).<sup>10</sup> Some physical characteristics are the consequence of customs shared by whole groups: after a battle between the Argives and Spartans, the Argives shaved their hair and enshrined in law that Argives could not grow out their hair again until they regained the lost territory, while the Spartans let their hair grow long after their victory (1.82.7–8).<sup>11</sup> Herodotus depicts the appearance of groups in granular detail, but he never describes individuals in this way. Herodotus also depicts the appearance of objects—for instance, the finely adorned couch and richly laden table used by the Athenians to demonstrate, visually, to the Pelasgians the sort of luxurious state in which they must deliver over their land (6.139.3)—but not the appearance of an individual’s body.<sup>12</sup>

Just as Herodotus does not portray the static appearance of individuals, so too he rarely describes the way these individuals moved their bodies and hands. The main exception are deictic expressions, which denote that a speaker points something out with his or her hand. For instance, the Milesian tyrant Aristagoras is described as pointing at a map when trying to persuade Cleomenes to attack Persia (5.49.5).<sup>13</sup> Apart from deictic expressions, the closest Herodotus comes to describing gestures is when he refers to some physical actions preceding speech.<sup>14</sup> For instance, the Spartan commander Amompharetus, when refusing to leave the battlefield of Plataea, is described as picking up a stone with both hands, throwing it down before Pausanias’ feet, and yelling that with this pebble he votes against fleeing from the Persians (9.55.2).<sup>15</sup> Some sense of the corporeal is suggested in these descriptions of physical actions. However, Herodotus rarely explicitly describes an individual’s gait, body language, hand gestures, or facial expressions.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For other physical descriptions of ethnic groups, see, e.g., Hdt. 3.12.1–3, 4.108.1.

<sup>11</sup> See also Hdt. 2.36.1, 2.66.4, 4.34.11.

<sup>12</sup> On different types of non-verbal communication in Herodotus, see Lateiner (1987) and Murnaghan (2001).

<sup>13</sup> de Jong (forthcoming), *ad* 1.114.5 lists passages in Herodotus that contain deictic pronouns or adverbs. When I presented a version of this paper at the 51<sup>st</sup> ISPCS conference at the Open University (Ra’anana, Israel), I. de Jong alerted me to the prevalence of deictic expressions in Herodotus. I profited greatly from the feedback I received at this conference.

<sup>14</sup> See Hdt. 4.113.2 on the gestures between Scythians and Amazons when they do not understand each other’s languages. Once the Amazons learn the Scythians’ language and start talking with them (4.114.1–2), there is no further mention of the use of the hands for the purposes of communication.

<sup>15</sup> See too Hdt. 1.45.1: Adrastus holds out his hands to Croesus before addressing him; 5.92f.2: in response to a question, Thrasybulus cuts off the tallest ears of wheat without offering a verbal explanation of his actions; and 9.76.1: a woman supplicates Pausanias by clasping his knees.

<sup>16</sup> Herodotus includes details that suggest a speaker’s facial expression. A description of an act of crying (e.g., in 9.16.3) is close to a description of a facial expression; on tears in Classical Greek and Hellenistic historiography, see Lateiner (2005). In several passages, Herodotus records laughter, mostly of Persian Kings (1.90.3, 3.29.1, 7.103.1). In Herodotus, the verb γελάω seems not to suggest a radiant or smiling face, as the verb can, for example, in Homer, on which see Clark (2005), 39–43. In Hdt. 1.116.1, Cyrus’ appearance and style of oratorical



In Thucydides, there are even fewer depictions of looks than in Herodotus. The only passage in which Thucydides offers a sense of someone's appearance is when he writes that Harmodius, one of the Tyrannicides, was radiant in the season of his youth (γενομένου δὲ Ἀρμοδίου ὄρα ἡλικίας λαμπροῦ, 6.54.2). Harmodius' looks matter in this context: his youthful beauty is what entices Hipparchus, the tyrant's son. Nevertheless, the adjective λαμπρός offers only a vague sense of Harmodius' looks.<sup>17</sup> Thucydides does not otherwise depict the appearance of individuals in his narrative. One would not know, by reading Thucydides, that Alcibiades was beautiful.<sup>18</sup> So too, Thucydides does not describe the way individuals gesture with their hands or make facial expressions when giving a speech. One is not made to see statesmen or sense their physical presence.

During his account of the plague, Thucydides does write about the physical symptoms of those who fell sick: red and inflamed eyes, the throat and tongue blood-red, the body reddish and livid, breaking out in small blisters and ulcers (2.49.2–5). Such vivid descriptions of the human body are absent outside this account of medical symptoms. Despite prefacing his account of the symptoms by commenting that he had the disease himself and saw others sick with it (2.48.3), Thucydides does not describe his own appearance when sick, but the appearance of the symptoms that anyone might get. The physical description is generalised: he hopes that someone in the future, who studies this description, might be able to recognise the disease, should it break out again (2.48.3). Occasionally, Thucydides makes visible the actions of groups of men: Brasidas says that the Athenians are wagging their spears and heads (5.10.5).<sup>19</sup> The Athenian soldiers on shore are described as swaying their bodies as they watch the Great Harbour Battle in Syracuse (7.71.3). Yet Thucydides does not describe in this way the movement of an individual's body.<sup>20</sup> In Classical Greek historiography, groups are made visible and sometimes differentiated one from the other, but individuals not.

In *Hellenica*, Xenophon adds a physical detail not found in his two historiographical predecessors. He twice refers to the facial expression of individuals: Agesilaus' beaming face (μάλα φαιδρῶ τῷ προσώπῳ, 3.4.11) and a messenger's very gloomy expression (μάλα σκυθρωπός, 4.5.7). Otherwise, Xenophon is much like his predecessors. He mentions beauty but in passing. For instance, he writes that Agesilaus told Otys, the King of the Paphlagonians, that a Persian satrap's daughter was thought to be more beautiful than that satrap's son (αὐτῷ καλλίονα εἶναι) and is very beautiful (καλλίστην μὲν οὔσαν, 4.1.6–7), and therefore Otys should marry her. In *Hellenica*, Xenophon is similar to Thucydides in that he mentions beauty when recounting amorous matters but rarely in

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delivery are mentioned, but not described. The gestures of groups, not individuals, are described in Hdt. 4.136.1, 6.58.3, 7.233.1.

<sup>17</sup> The reference to Harmodius' radiance may recall the reference to the radiance of the sight of the Athenians' army (ὄψεως λαμπρότητι, Thuc. 6.31.6). In neither passage does Thucydides present the radiance of the object as a legitimate motivation for action. My thanks to D. Sutton for alerting me to this intratext.

<sup>18</sup> In 6.15.4, Thucydides skirts around a visual depiction of Alcibiades, writing of the indecency of Alcibiades' body with regard to his way of living (τῆς τε κατὰ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σῶμα παρανομίας ἐς τὴν διαίταν).

<sup>19</sup> See also Thuc. 3.66.2, 4.38 for descriptions of the hand movements of groups.

<sup>20</sup> The closest is Thuc. 4.130.4: a description of someone being grabbed by the hand.

other contexts.<sup>21</sup> Overall, Classical Greek historians either do not describe the looks of individuals or describe them briefly, in non-specific ways.<sup>22</sup>

The Classical Greek historians are not alone in ignoring appearances. Attic orators similarly tend to refrain from discussing looks. E. D. Phillips puts it too strongly, but only just, when he writes that ‘there is no physical description of persons even in the most vituperative passages of Greek oratory.’<sup>23</sup> The Attic orators attack each other bitterly, but they rarely do so by mocking each other’s appearance. Only once does Demosthenes criticise Aeschines for his appearance: in the agora Aeschines has puffed out cheeks, puckered eyebrows, and a gait like that of Pythocles (19.314).<sup>24</sup> Other references to bodily appearance are brief: Demosthenes says that Euthynos is strong and dark (21.71); Aeschines says that Timarchus’ body was, in his youth, well-developed (εὖσαρκον ὄντα, 1.41) but that later in life Timarchus was painful to the sight (ἀργαλέος ὄν τὴν ὄψιν, 1.61); Lysias that Archedemus had watery eyes (14.25).<sup>25</sup> The body (σῶμα) may be referred to (as in Aeschines 2.88) but its appearance is seldom described.

At times, it seems that the orators are actively avoiding the topic. Aeschines compares Demosthenes to Thersites, and yet, despite drawing this comparison, does not mention either man’s looks. Aeschines says that Homer describes Thersites as a coward and slanderer (φησὶν Ὅμηρος ἄνανδρον αὐτὸν εἶναι καὶ συκοφάντην, 3.231). Homer uses neither the term ἄναδρος nor συκοφάντης.<sup>26</sup> Instead, as discussed in the next section of this paper, Homer depicts Thersites’ physical qualities, the sorts of qualities Attic orators ignore.

Orators only describe appearances at any length when arguing for the deceptive nature or irrelevance of appearances. Demosthenes and Apollodorus acknowledge that their fast gait annoys others but state that they can do nothing about it and so it should not be held against them (Demosthenes 37.52, 55; [Demosthenes] 45.77). Lysias says that a man should be judged by his actions, not his appearance (16.19).<sup>27</sup> Demosthenes warns that appearances can be deceptive: he refers to grey-haired men with sour looks who, despite this austere appearance, are in fact wicked and indecent in private (Dem. 54.34).<sup>28</sup> Apollodorus comes closest to drawing a physiognomic interpretation: he argues that Stephanus’ sullen appearance is not what it seems. It is not a sign of self-control but of misanthropy since Stephanus has consciously put on this expression to avoid getting approached with requests from passers-by ([Dem.] 45.68–69). These speakers feel the need to defend themselves against potential physiognomic attacks, and once each,

<sup>21</sup> See also Xen., *Hell.* 5.4.4.

<sup>22</sup> The absence of physical descriptions in Classical Greek historiography has been noted by Evans (1969), 6, 46; Cook (2016), 30; Vout (2022), 247.

<sup>23</sup> Phillips (1972), 148.

<sup>24</sup> MacDowell (2000), *ad loc.* takes this passage to mean that Aeschines walked in step with Pythocles, a companion of his. At least when Posidonius in *BNJ*87 F36 uses the same phrase, he is referring to the gait of Pythocles.

<sup>25</sup> See also Aeschines 1.49, Andocides 1.100, Demades *BNJ*227 T85. J. Kucharski alerted me to this last fragment.

<sup>26</sup> See Serafim (2017), 102.

<sup>27</sup> See too Hyperides fr. D2 (= fr. 196). See O’Connell (2017), 29 n.17 on the unnecessary tradition of emending Lysias 16.19 to have the text refer specifically to Mantitheos’ hair.

<sup>28</sup> On this passage, see Hesk (1999), 221–24.

Demosthenes and Apollodorus question the sincerity of another person's sullen, sober appearance. However, these speakers rarely go on the offensive themselves. They do not explicitly describe an individual's static physiognomy; on the rare occasions that they describe someone's facial expression or gait, they note its insignificance or warn against drawing straightforward inferences from it.<sup>29</sup>

Attic orators also rarely refer to the way they themselves or others move their bodies. E. C. Evans notes that there was 'an almost complete absence of description in facial expression or gesture in the Attic orators.'<sup>30</sup> A search, admittedly non-exhaustive, of Attic oratory only slightly modifies Evans' assertion: four references have been found to a speaker's gestures and two references to the expression on someone's face while speaking.<sup>31</sup> The references to facial expressions are brief. Aeschines twice says that someone looked sullen when speaking (σκυθρωπάσας, 1.83, 2.36).

The four references to gestures are also all made by Aeschines.<sup>32</sup> In *Against Timarchus*, Aeschines says that public speakers from the past thought it insolent to speak with the arm outside the cloak, and refrained from doing so, unlike speakers in his own day (1.25). Aeschines then contrasts Solon's gestural restraint with Timarchus' speaking style:

σκέψασθε δὴ, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ὅσον διαφέρει ὁ Σόλων Τιμάρχου καὶ οἱ ἄνδρες ἐκεῖνοι ὧν ὀλίγω πρότερον ἐπεμνήσθην. ἐκεῖνοι μὲν γε ἤσχύοντο ἔξω τὴν χεῖρα ἔχοντες λέγειν, οὐτοσὶ δὲ οὐ πάλαι, ἀλλὰ πρῶην ποτὲ ρίψας θοίματιον γυμνὸς ἐπαγκρατίαζεν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, οὕτω κακῶς καὶ αἰσχρῶς διακείμενος τὸ σῶμα ὑπὸ μέθης καὶ βδελυρίας, ὥστε τοὺς γε εὖ φρονοῦντας ἐγκαλύψασθαι, αἰσχυνθέντας ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως, εἰ τοιούτοις συμβούλοις χρώμεθα. (Aeschines 1.26)

See now, fellow citizens, how unlike to Timarchus were Solon and those men of old whom I mentioned a moment ago. They were too modest to speak with the arm outside the cloak, but this man not long ago, yes, only the other day, in an assembly of the people threw off his cloak and leaped about like a gymnast, half naked, his body so reduced and befouled through drunkenness and lewdness that right-minded men, at least, covered their eyes, being ashamed for the city, that we should let such men as he be our advisers.<sup>33</sup>

In this passage, a critique of Timarchus' expansive oratorical gestures slides into a critique of his lewd body.<sup>34</sup> Aeschines does not even mention the content of Timarchus' speech; the issue with the speech is its delivery. Fittingly, according to Aeschines, the

<sup>29</sup> But see Tanner (2006), 121–24, 127, 129–31, 134, who lists most of the passages cited above, and treats them as indicative of Attic orators' interest in the facial and bodily manifestations of character, and then contextualises this interest within the visual culture of democratic Athens; O'Connell (2017), 69 similarly argues that Aeschines and Demosthenes are fond of physiognomic interpretations.

<sup>30</sup> Evans (1969), 41.

<sup>31</sup> My search of Attic oratory has been less thorough than my search of Classical Greek historiography. I supplemented my reading of the primary material with relevant word searches in *TLG* (e.g., σῶμα, σχῆμα, σκυθρωπός, φαῖδρός) and with the passages cited by, among others, Hesk (1999); Worman (2008); O'Connell (2017); and Serafim (2017), (2020), (2024).

<sup>32</sup> There is one reference to not an oratorical gesture but a gesture of courtship in Aeschin. 1.61.

<sup>33</sup> The translation is by C. D. Adams.

<sup>34</sup> See Fisher (2001), 56.

assembly-goers react not by blocking their ears but by covering their eyes (ἐγκαλύψασθαι).

Demosthenes responds by arguing that Aeschines is wrong to bring up the topic of gestures. According to Demosthenes, what matters are not Solon's gestures but his thoughts and purpose (τὴν ψυχὴν τὴν Σόλωνος ... καὶ τὴν διάνοιαν), and on this count Aeschines is no mimic of Solon (19.252). What is required is not oratory with enfolded hands, but diplomacy with enfolded hands, and Aeschines should therefore stop stretching out his hand for bribes when on diplomatic missions in Macedon (19.255). There survives a second pair of passages in which Aeschines criticises the use of excessive gestures (he says that Demosthenes was whirling himself around the speaker's platform, Aeschin. 3.167), to which Demosthenes responds that it is frivolous to focus on gestures (Dem. 18.232).<sup>35</sup> The evidence from Attic oratory suggests, first, that Aeschines stood out for the attention he paid to oratorical gestures (no one, apart from Aeschines, initiates a discussion about gestures); second, that Demosthenes and his ally Timarchus potentially were known for their extravagant gestures; and third, that Demosthenes felt able, when rebutting these critiques, to argue that gestures did not matter.<sup>36</sup>

Attic orators almost wholly ignore the visual element of speech, but not the vocal. Demosthenes says that Aeschines only has his voice to offer since his words are devoid of content (19.336). Three times, he mocks Aeschines for engaging in voice-training (φωνασκία).<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere, he says that Aeschines has the loudest cry and a penetrating voice (18.59–60). Later in the same speech, he says that only when Aeschines has something to say in prejudice of a fellow citizen is his voice magnificent (λαμπροφωνότατος), only then is he a great actor, a true tragic Theocrines (ὑπόκριτης ἄριστος, τραγικός Θεοκρίνης, 18.313).<sup>38</sup> Demosthenes compares Aeschines' voice to that of the actor, Theocrines, and yet neither he nor Aeschines draws an analogy between oratorical and theatrical gestures. The same phenomenon is found in speeches by other Attic orators: they describe the way speakers use their voices but not bodies, hands or faces.<sup>39</sup>

Authors of Classical Greek rhetorical treatises also ignore the physical dimension of speech-making. Aristotle refers only twice to what someone looks like when speaking (*Rhetoric* 2.8.14, 3.7.10).<sup>40</sup> In *Rhetoric* 3, Aristotle discusses oratorical delivery (ὑπόκρισις), treating it as a sub-set of style (λέξις). However, for Aristotle, delivery is not about the face or body. He defines it solely in terms of the use of the voice (ἔστι δὲ αὐτὴ μὲν ἐν τῇ φωνῇ, 3.1.4).<sup>41</sup> A rhetorical treatise from around the same time, the *Rhetorica*

<sup>35</sup> Twice elsewhere Aeschines mocks Demosthenes for his gestures (2.42, 2.49), without any recorded response from Demosthenes.

<sup>36</sup> Worman (2008), 258 suggests that Aeschines' criticism of Demosthenes' gesticulation was to indicate Demosthenes' effeminacy.

<sup>37</sup> See Dem. 18.308–09, 19.255, 19.336.

<sup>38</sup> For other references by Demosthenes to Aeschines' voice, see Easterling (1999), 159–60. Aeschines responds in kind: see Aeschin. 2.156, 3.209–10, 3.228.

<sup>39</sup> On an orator's voice, see [Dem.] 40.53, Isaeus 6.59, Hyperides 5 col. 12, all cited by Hall (1995), 48; see also Isocrates 5.81.

<sup>40</sup> See Arist., *Poet.* 26 on gestures within poetic contexts.

<sup>41</sup> Throughout *Rhetoric*, ὑπόκρισις refers to the use of the voice alone. Sansone (2012), 12 notes that in *Poetics*, esp. chs. 14, 26, Aristotle denigrates ὄψις, and that there is a comparable

*ad Alexandrum*, similarly ignores the body language, gestures, and facial expressions of speakers.

It is not that the appearance and movements of public figures are invisible across all Classical Greek genres. The Old Comic playwrights make use of the comic potential of physical appearances.<sup>42</sup> Aristophanes refers to Cleon's big teeth and the terrible flashing of his eyes (*Wasps* 1031–32; *Clouds* 754–55), and to the effeminate appearance of the Athenian ambassador Cleisthenes (*Acharnians* 119–21, *Thesmophoriazusae* 575).<sup>43</sup> The playwright Cratinus is said to have described the terrifying eyebrows of Cleon (Cratinus fr. 228 [= Lucian, *Timon* 30]). And according to Plutarch, a number of Old Comic playwrights ridiculed Pericles for his long head.<sup>44</sup> Such descriptions, permissible in comedy, are not found in Classical Greek historiography or oratory.

A rare description of an orator's gestures is found in *The Athenian Constitution* from the school of Aristotle:

προειστήκει ... τοῦ δὲ δήμου Κλέων ὁ Κλεαινέτου, ὃς δοκεῖ μάλιστα διαφθεῖραι τὸν δῆμον ταῖς ὀρμαῖς, καὶ πρῶτος ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος ἀνέκραγε καὶ ἐλοιδορήσατο, καὶ περιζωσάμενος ἐδημηγόρησε, τῶν ἄλλων ἐν κόσμῳ λεγόντων (*Ath. Pol.* 28.3).

The head of the People was Cleon son of Cleaenetus, who is thought to have done the most to corrupt the people by his impetuous outbursts, and was the first person to use bawling and abuse on the platform, and to gird up his cloak making a public speech, all other persons speaking in orderly fashion.<sup>45</sup>

Outside of the speeches of Aeschines, this is the only passage in Classical Greek literature that describes in any detail an orator's movements on the speaker's platform. Cleon's cloak, when rolled up, presumably allowed for freer and more expansive gestures. Much like Aeschines on Timarchus, the author of *The Athenian Constitution* connects Cleon's debased politics to a debased style of oratorical delivery.<sup>46</sup> This portrayal of Cleon's delivery, while repeated by authors centuries later, is not found in Thucydides or in any other Classical Greek sources.<sup>47</sup> Classical Greek historians and orators do not emphasise the politics of visual appearances.

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prejudice in *Rhetoric*, given that Aristotle calls the study of delivery vulgar, 3.1.4–5. Aristotle's denigration of the visual is even greater than Sansone would have it: Aristotle does not even include the visual within his conception of ὑπόκρισις.

<sup>42</sup> See Evans (1969), 35. For descriptions of bodies in Aristophanes not mentioned by Evans, see *Clouds* 340–55 and *Peace* 545–49. On Socrates' appearance in *Clouds*, see Zanker (1995), 32; see also Athenaeus 11.509b–c for Ephippus on the appearance of Plato's disciples. See Aristophanes, *Clouds* 998, 1002, 1010 on physical appearance but not with reference to individuals.

<sup>43</sup> Thanks to G. Maltagliati for this reference to Cleisthenes' appearance.

<sup>44</sup> See Plut., *Per.* 3.2–4, 13.6, citing Cratinus, Teleclides, and Eupolis.

<sup>45</sup> The translation is by H. Rackham.

<sup>46</sup> The author's reference to the orderly fashion of other people's speech may allude to the description of Thersites' disorderly speech in Homer, *Il.* 2.213–14; thanks to M. Ward for raising this point to me.

<sup>47</sup> The scholiast *ad* Aeschin. 1.25 connects Aeschin. 1.25 with *Ath. Pol.* 28.3. See too the scholiast on Lucian's *Timon* 30, who cites *Ath. Pol.* 28.3, Theopompus *FGrH*115 F92 and Philochorus *FGrH*328 F128b. The latter two fragments concern other actions done by Cleon; the scholiast does not suggest that Theopompus or Philochorus described Cleon's oratorical

In philosophical texts, Socrates' striking, ugly appearance is discussed in some detail. In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Theodorus compares Theaetetus' appearance to that of Socrates in that he has a snub nose and protruding eyes (τὴν τε σιμότητα καὶ τὸ ἔξω τῶν ὀμμάτων, 143e–44a); nevertheless, Theodorus states, this young man has marvellously fine inner qualities.<sup>48</sup> Some of the depictions of Socrates are, at least superficially, playful in tone. For instance, Meno says that, if he is to have his jest (εἰ δεῖ τι καὶ σκῶψαι), Socrates both in appearance and in other respects is like the flat torpedo sea-fish, which numbs anyone who touches it (*Meno* 80a). In Plato's *Symposium*, Alcibiades compares Socrates' appearance to that of Silenus and the satyr Marsyas (215a–b). He later states that Socrates is like Silenus not just in appearance, but also in speech: his discourses first seem absurd but when they are opened and one gets inside them, one discovers that they are the only speeches with any sense in them; no other speech is so divine or rich in the images of virtue (221d–22a).

In Plato, appearances are deceptive, but they are also more than that. For Alcibiades, Socrates' Silenus-appearance is used, analogously, to make sense of his Silenus-speech: it may at first seem coarse, but this initial appearance is misleading. In Plato's dialogues, the contrast between Socrates' ugly appearance and inner worth challenges one to consider how to reason from earthly phenomena. In Plato's *Statesman*, the Eleatic Stranger suggests that Theaetetus should rest and the Younger Socrates (no relation to Socrates) take his place in the conversation (257c). Socrates agrees, saying that both boys have a certain kinship to him (μοὶ ζυγγένειαν ἔχειν τινά, 257d) since Theaetetus looks like him in the appearance of his face (κατὰ τὴν τοῦ προσώπου φύσιν) and the Younger Socrates has the same name as he does. According to Socrates, facial likeness and homonymy are a certain type of συγγένεια (kinship). This statement may invite one to consider which qualities, beyond appearances and names, would lead someone to have true kinship with Socrates.<sup>49</sup>

In Plato, the problem of appearances is an entry-point for philosophical investigation. By contrast, appearances in Attic oratory and historiography do not serve this investigatory function. Most of the time, Attic orators and historians do not even explicitly reject the value of appearances. Rather than argue that appearances are deceptive, they normally just ignore them. The presence of a genre divide between philosophy and other prose genres is clearest when comparing the different works by Xenophon. In the *Apology*, after recording a lengthy speech by Socrates, Xenophon writes that Socrates departed cheerful in his eyes, posture, and step, as fully agreed with the words he had just spoken (εἰπὼν δὲ ταῦτα μάλα ὁμολογουμένως δὴ τοῖς εἰρημένοις ἀπῆει καὶ ὄμμασι καὶ σχήματι καὶ βαδίσματι φαιδρός, *Apology* 27). Socrates then stroked the head of a follower of his,

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gestures. See also Plut., *Nic.* 8.3, *Ti. Gracch.* 2.2. Rhodes (1981), 354 suggests that the description of Cleon in *Ath. Pol.* 28.3 may be derived from comedy.

<sup>48</sup> In *De Fato* 5.10 and *Tusc.* 4.37.80, Cicero refers to the wrong physiognomic interpretations of Socrates made by Zopyrus. Physiognomic assumptions that find correspondences, not dissonances, between inner and outer qualities, are also found in Plato: see *Laws* 665, 815e–f and *Laches* 182c–d. For descriptions of the appearance of groups, see Plato, *Republic* 454c, 474d–75a, 495e, 518d–19a.

<sup>49</sup> My thanks to Betegh G. for this point.

Apollodorus, before addressing him (*Apology* 27–28).<sup>50</sup> However, as seen above, in his historical work, the *Hellenica*, Xenophon follows the historiographical precedent set by Herodotus and Thucydides, and ignores the physical impressions left by individuals.

In Xenophon's biography, *Agésilas*, appearances also rarely feature. Xenophon twice describes Agésilas' cheerful expression (1.13, 10.2), but otherwise gives little sense of Agésilas' appearance. So too, in Isocrates' *Evagoras*, Isocrates notes that Evagoras was beautiful (κάλλος, 22), but does not elaborate further on his looks, and later argues that appearances do not matter (44, 75). In Classical Greek biography, as in historiography and oratory, appearances are almost wholly ignored. This all may seem hardly worth pausing over except for the fact that Classical Greek historians, biographers, orators, and authors of rhetorical treatises are exceptional for their reluctance to depict the physical characteristics and movements of statesmen.

#### COMPARISONS ACROSS TIME

In Homer, appearances and gestures have communicative power.<sup>51</sup> Thersites' body is a physical manifestation of his character:

αἴσχιστος δὲ ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθε·  
 φολκὸς ἔην, χλωλὸς δ' ἔτερον πόδα· τῶ δέ οἱ ὤμω  
 κυρτῶ, ἐπὶ στῆθος συνοχωκότε· αὐτὰρ ὑπερθε  
 φοξὸς ἔην κεφαλῆν, ψεδνὴ δ' ἐπενήνοθε λάχνη.  
 (Homer, *Iliad* 2.216–19)

Ugly was he beyond all men who came to Ilios: he was bandy-legged and lame in one foot, and his shoulders were rounded, hunching together over his chest, and above them his head was pointed, and a scant stubble grew on it.<sup>52</sup>

The word αἴσχιστος is both physical and moral: Thersites is ugly and also disgraceful, and Thersites' body reveals his ugly disgracefulness. Thersites' outer looks and inner character correspond. For others, there is a mismatch: Nireus is beautiful but weak (*Il.* 2.673–75), as is Paris (3.44–45).<sup>53</sup> Irrespective of whether a link is drawn between inner and outer characteristics, a constant in Homer is the propensity to portray the characters' bodies and faces.<sup>54</sup> In a few lines in *Iliad* 1, Athena grabs Achilles by his yellow hair (1.197); Athena herself has flashing eyes (1.200), and she has been sent by white-armed Hera (1.195). In these lines, the actions of the characters are described, but so too a sense is given of their bodies and faces.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> See also Xen., *Symp.* 5.6, 8.3; *Mem.* 3.10.5.

<sup>51</sup> See Purves (2019); Lateiner (1995); Goldhill (1998), 105.

<sup>52</sup> The translation is by A. T. Murray, revised by W. F. Wyatt.

<sup>53</sup> See Krieter-Spiro (2009), *ad Il.* 3.44–45.

<sup>54</sup> Descriptions of deceptive physical appearances (and the inferences characters draw from these appearances) are found throughout the *Odyssey*; see Lateiner (1995), 167–202.

<sup>55</sup> Many Homeric epithets relate to the body; these bodily qualities can be connected to emotional states. For instance, see Winkler (2017) on the implications of the epithet 'fair-ankled'.

Homer also describes gestures and facial expressions. For instance, a tense conversation on Olympus comes alive with physical movement: Hera is described as sitting down after having given a speech and laughing but just with her lips, her forehead above her dark brows unrelaxed: ἡ δὲ γέλασσε / χεῖλεσιν, οὐδὲ μέτωπον ἐπ' ὄφρῦσι κυανέησιν / ἰάνθη (*Iliad* 15.101–03). Ares responds to Hera with words but he first reacts physically, slapping his sturdy thighs with the palm of his hand (αὐτὰρ Ἄρης θαλερῶ πεπλήγετο μηρῶ / χερσὶ καταπηνέσσει, 15.113–14).<sup>56</sup> It is a commonly held view that Classical Greek historians, when presenting speeches, follow the Homeric model.<sup>57</sup> However, when it comes to describing a speaker's body and face, Classical Greek historians are not Homeric.

Hellenistic historians are far more likely than Classical Greek historians to adopt the Homeric propensity to depict the looks and gestures of individuals. Polybius writes that the Carthaginian general, Hasdrubal, was by nature corpulent, and had become potbellied and unnaturally red in the face (38.8.7–8). Hasdrubal's negligent leadership is revealed by his body: he continues to fatten himself even while the Carthaginians are undergoing hardships.<sup>58</sup> When Scipio offers Hasdrubal terms of surrender, Hasdrubal reacts by slapping his thighs (38.8.8)—the first appearance of this gesture within extant historiography. During negotiations between Flaminius and Philip V of Macedon, Philip, responding to a joke told by Flaminius, smiles sardonically (ὕπομειδιάσας σαρδάνιον, 18.7.6)—the first appearance of the verb μειδιάω in historiography. These physical descriptions, unlike those in earlier historiography, are distinctly Homeric.<sup>59</sup>

Polybius' continuator, Posidonius, also depicts the appearance and bodily movements of individuals. In a lengthy fragment, Posidonius records a speech delivered to the Athenians in 88 BCE by the philosopher-statesman Athenion. Posidonius writes that Athenion, before he began his speech, looked around in a circle and raised his eyes (περιβλέψας κυκλιθὸν τὸ πλῆθος, ἔπειτ' ἀναβλέψας, *BNJ*87 F36 [= Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 5.212e–13e]). Mid-way through the speech, Athenion paused and rubbed his forehead (μικρὸν δ' ἐπισχῶν ἐπὶ τούτοις ... τρίψας τε τὸ μέτωπον). Once the speech was over, the Athenians rushed to the Theatre of Dionysus and elected Athenion

<sup>56</sup> On the meaning of Ares' thigh-slap, see Lowenstam (1981), 33–34.

<sup>57</sup> See Kitto (1966), 282–83; Kennedy (1973), ix; Lang (1984), 37; Woodman (1988), 13; Duff (2003), 20.

<sup>58</sup> Polybius explores the relationship between inner and outer characteristics in, e.g., 11.39.9, 25.3.5–8, 30.27.4, 33.3.7–9, 33.4.1. However, in some passages, Polybius mentions that a person was beautiful but, in a manner similar to that of Classical Greek historians, does not describe the features that made that person beautiful: see, e.g., 16.34.6.

<sup>59</sup> For the sardonic smile in Homer, see Homer, *Od.* 20.301–02, on which see Lateiner (1995), 193–95; for the act of slapping the thigh in Homer, see Lowenstam (1981). In 15.26.1, Polybius describes a speaker's tears more vividly than previous historians had. See too Polyb. 31.23.8–9 for the first appearance of a blush in historiography. Too little survives of Hellenistic historians prior to Polybius to gauge the degree to which these historians depicted the human form in all its variety. For some physical descriptions, see Duris *BNJ*76 F10, F17, and F60. Fragments of other 'tragic' historians such as Phylarchus include no detailed descriptions of the human form. For a rare description of an appearance in a Classical Greek fragment, see Ctesias *BNJ*688 F16 (= Diodorus 2.23.1) on the way an Assyrian king applied white colouring to his face.



general. When the newly elected Athenion entered the orchestra of the theatre to commence a second speech, Polybius writes that he had the gait of Pythocles (ἴσα βαίνων Πυθοκλεῖ).<sup>60</sup> Unlike Classical Greek historians, Posidonius has one imagine what it was like to see as well as hear the speech.<sup>61</sup>

The propensity to make statesmen visible is not particular to Hellenistic historians. It is evident in Roman Late Republican and Principate oratory, historiography, and biography.<sup>62</sup> Corbeill writes: ‘even the casual reader of Ciceronian oratory, especially invective, is struck by the frequency with which opponents are characterized by descriptions that emphasize their sheer physicality.’<sup>63</sup> To give one example, Cicero suggests that there is a connection between Fannius Chaerea’s external and internal qualities:

Nonne ipsum caput et supercilia illa penitus abrasa olere malitiam et clamitare calliditatem videntur? non ab imis unguibus usque ad verticem summum, si quam coniecturam affert hominibus tacita corporis figura, ex fraude, fallaciis, mendaciis constare totus videtur? (Cicero, *Pro Roscio comoedo* 7.20)

Do not the head itself, and those clean-shaven eyebrows seem to reek of malice and proclaim craftiness aloud? If one can make a guess from the silent form of a man’s body, does not Fannius seem to be composed entirely of fraud, trickery, and lies from the tips of his fingers to the top of his head?<sup>64</sup>

In this passage, Cicero draws physiognomic inferences while admitting that physiognomy is not an exact science.<sup>65</sup> In other speeches, he argues against straightforward physiognomic interpretations, warning his audience not to be taken in by Piso’s furrowed brow; Piso is putting on a deceptive display of an austere appearance (*Pro Sestio* 19). As seen above, Demosthenes and Apollodorus similarly argued that sullen expressions should not be taken as signs of self-control or decency, but they made this argument only once each. Cicero repeatedly returns to this point.<sup>66</sup> In addition, the Attic orators focused on bodily actions (facial expressions and styles of walking) and only referred to these actions in order to argue against making judgments based on them. They rarely positively asserted that bodily actions could be an indicator of one’s character. By contrast, Cicero routinely makes the case both for and against physiognomic interpretations, and these

<sup>60</sup> On the theatricality of this scene, see Chaniotis (2013), 202–04.

<sup>61</sup> See Posidonius *BNJ*87 F43, F126 for other portrayals of gestures and physiognomies.

<sup>62</sup> For physical appearances and bodily movements in Sallust, see *Cat.* 15.5, 31.7, 61.4; *Iug.* 113.3; in Livy, Velleius, and Nepos, see the passages cited in Evans (1969), 92–93. For descriptions of oratorical delivery in Livy, see Bartolomé (2016) and Aprile (2016), 81–83. For facial expressions in Livy, see Oakley (2005), *ad Livy* 9.5.8.

<sup>63</sup> Corbeill (2004), 111.

<sup>64</sup> The translation is by J. H. Freese.

<sup>65</sup> On Cicero’s visualisation of *virtus*, see Bell (1997), 19. For a statement about the technical art of physiognomy, see Cic., *De Legibus* 1.9.26–27.

<sup>66</sup> On Piso’s false display of *virtus*, see Cic., *Pis.* 1.1, 6.12–13, 9.20, 41.98–99; *Prov. cons.* 4.8; *Brut.* 239; *Red. Sen.* 15–16.

interpretations can be based on someone's static physiognomy as well as bodily actions. By Cicero's time, appearances are firmly part of political debate.<sup>67</sup>

In his rhetorical treatises, Cicero also pays attention to the ways in which orators use their bodies to communicate. In *De Oratore*, Cicero links the communication of different emotions (*motus animi*) with different visible movements of the body. Cicero has one of the two main interlocutors of the treatise, Crassus, say: *omnis enim motus animi suum quendam a natura habet vultum et sonum et gestum* (*De Oratore* 3.216). ('For by nature, every emotion has its own facial expression, tone of voice, and gesture.')<sup>68</sup> A few passages later, Crassus utters the line: *est enim actio quasi sermo corporis* (3.222). ('Delivery is, so to speak, the language of the body.') Crassus' main interlocutor, Marcus Antonius, says that the audience will feel nothing unless emotions are visibly stamped or branded on the orator himself (2.189). Antonius presents words alone, with no visual accompaniment, as weak conveyers of emotion.<sup>69</sup>

During the Roman Empire, Suetonius describes in detail the looks of the emperors. For Suetonius, physical descriptions are a core component of his biographical project. For instance, he writes that the eyes and temples of Caligula were hollow, his forehead broad and grim, the hair thin and entirely gone on the top of his head, though his body was hairy; not only was his face naturally ugly, but he also made it more savage by practicing fearsome expressions in front of the mirror (*Caligula* 50.1).<sup>70</sup> Across the *Lives*, Suetonius describes emperors' static physiognomies and bodily actions. A Roman emperor's appearance was primarily seen via his images reproduced across the Empire. J. B. Meister argues that Suetonius, by offering close-up views of the emperors, sought to deny the emperors a monarchical, charismatic, super-natural status, as seen in their often-sanitised official portraits.<sup>71</sup> Irrespective of the cause of the inclusion of such descriptions, the inclusion is at odds with the practice of Classical Greek biographers.

Compared with Suetonius, Tacitus hardly discusses the different physiognomies of individuals.<sup>72</sup> He includes only one striking depiction of an individual: Tiberius in old age, bald, bent, emaciated, with an ulcerous face (*Annals* 4.57.2). However, he still discusses the appearance of the body and face more than Classical Greek historians do.<sup>73</sup> So too,

<sup>67</sup> For a description of appearances and gestures in oratory during the Principate, see Pliny, *Panegyricus* 2.5, 4.4, 67.1, 71.6.

<sup>68</sup> The translation of Cicero's *De Oratore* is by J. M. May and J. Wisse.

<sup>69</sup> Physical delivery is also discussed in *Rhet. Her.* 1.2.3, 3.15.26–27 and Quint. 11.3. On possible references to body language in Hellenistic rhetorical treatises, see fragments of Theophrastus in Cic., *De Or.* 3.221 and Athanasius, *Prefatory Remarks to Hermogenes' On Issues* [= *RhGr* vol. 14 p.177.3–8 Rabe]; and fragments of Demetrius of Phaleron in Dion. Hal., *Dem.* 53.4 and Plut., *Dem.* 11.1.

<sup>70</sup> See Rohrbacher (2010) on the flexibility of Suetonius' physiognomic interpretations.

<sup>71</sup> See Meister (2012), 138, 152–53 on the difficulty of seeing an emperor up-close. Trimble (2014), 117–23 analyses the discrepancies between Suetonius' physical descriptions and the appearance of public statues. On the subversive effect of Suetonius' physiognomic descriptions, see Meister (2012), 200–01, 218, 262. On this topic, I profited from discussions with J. Koltermann.

<sup>72</sup> See Syme (1958), 343; Meister (2012), 141.

<sup>73</sup> See Tac., *Ann.* 2.30.2, 2.72.2, 4.15.3, 12.49.1.

Tacitus frequently depicts bodily actions and expressions.<sup>74</sup> For instance, Tacitus writes that when a Senator, Gallus, could not interpret the meaning of Tiberius' words, he looked at Tiberius' face and only in this way understood that he had offended Tiberius (*Ann.* 1.12.1–3). In other passages, *vultus* and *verba* are not set against one another but treated as interigeable forms of communication. Tiberius is inscrutable in both *sermo* and *vultus* (*Ann.* 1.33.2). Tiberius questions a defendant with both his *vox* and *vultus* (*Ann.* 3.67.2). Tacitus suggests that there are two central methods of communication—with the spoken word and with the face—and that they often operate together.<sup>75</sup> By contrast, Classical Greek historians almost never mention a speaker's face (πρόσωπον) or appearance (σχῆμα), let alone the way a speaker communicates via facial expressions.

Tacitus depicts the body of a speaker particularly when narrating military mutinies. Near the start of the *Annals*, Junius Blaesus, the commander of the Pannonian legions, imprisons some mutinous soldiers, only for this act to embolden the other mutineers. Tacitus writes that a common soldier, Vibulenus, gave a speech while hoisted on the shoulders of the soldiers around him (*Ann.* 1.22.1), and that he added to the effects of his speech by weeping and striking his face and breast (*incendebat haec fletu et pectus atque os manibus verberans*, 1.23.1).<sup>76</sup> According to Tacitus, it was not just Vibulenus' words that were effective, but also the performance of those words. In Tacitus, depending on the setting of the speech, the gestures differ.<sup>77</sup> Speeches in military camps call for more expansive, dramatic gestures than those in the senate-house.<sup>78</sup> Yet no matter the speech's setting, Tacitus, more often than not, makes some remarks about a speaker's face, body, or hands.

The style, purpose, and context of the depictions of the human body drawn by Homer, Hellenistic historians, and Roman historians, biographers, orators, and authors of rhetorical treatises varied greatly. These variations are not this paper's main object of analysis. Of note is the fact that Classical Greek authors were exceptional for not judging politicians pictorially.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE UNDESCRIBED

Classical Greek historians, orators, biographers, and authors of rhetorical treatises tended to ignore the human body (whether static or in motion). Perhaps somewhat analogously, Classical Greek artists hardly differentiated between the appearance of individuals. In much of Classical Greek art, individualising physical features are eschewed.<sup>79</sup> R. G.

<sup>74</sup> On facial expressions in Tacitus, see Goodyear (1981), *ad Ann.* 2.57.2; see also Ihrig (2007).

<sup>75</sup> See Tac., *Ann.* 2.34.3, 4.74.5, 6.50.1, *Hist.* 4.8.2 for further pairings of the face and word.

<sup>76</sup> Corporeal description is crucial to the whole episode: see the mutinous soldiers' display of their bodies in *Ann.* 1.18.1; the impact of the sight of Drusus on the soldiers in 1.25.1–2; and the story recounted in 1.29.4 that Vibulenus' and Pecennius' bodies were thrown outside of the entrenchment for all to see.

<sup>77</sup> See *Ann.* 13.14.3 for a reference to Agrippina's hand gestures while speaking.

<sup>78</sup> See the dramatic gestures made by Germanicus and by mutinous soldiers in *Ann.* 1.34–35.

<sup>79</sup> Tanner (2006), 97 argues for some individualising features in Classical Greek art, citing the portrait of Pindar from c. 450 BCE. Dillon (2006), 5, 77, 127–28 suggests that there was a broader range of styles in fourth-century BCE Greek portraits than usually presumed, while

Osborne notes the striking uniformity of the bodies depicted on the Parthenon Frieze, ‘bodies that cannot be told apart’.<sup>80</sup> In the Frieze, men are depicted in one of two ways—as young or old—and women in only one way.<sup>81</sup> The bodies and faces of the horses are more differentiated—with the presence or absence of throbbing veins and flaring nostrils—than those of the men (see fig. 1).<sup>82</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Marble relief, Block XL from the North Frieze of the Parthenon. British Museum. Photograph from <https://w.wiki/9e8q>, CC BY-SA 4.0 Deed.

This physical homogeneity is evident across a range of visual media. It is found on Attic vases and grave *stelai*, at least until the latter part of the fourth century BCE.<sup>83</sup> Visual uniformity is also a feature of public performances. In Classical Athens, masks were worn in religious processions and most notably during theatrical productions.<sup>84</sup> These masks covered the face, hiding the facial features of those wearing them. In addition, the choice of masks seems to have been limited in number. In Classical Greek tragedy, there were

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acknowledging that it is hard to date the Greek originals from Roman copies. See too Pollini (2012), 42 on the realism of some Classical Greek portraiture.

<sup>80</sup> Osborne (2018), 218.

<sup>81</sup> Osborne (1987), 103.

<sup>82</sup> Osborne (2011), 117.

<sup>83</sup> See Webster (1956a), 17; Dillon (2006), 6, 67. When bodies are differentiated on Attic vases—see, e.g., Vout (2022), 142—they seem to represent types of people, not individuals.

<sup>84</sup> On masks in processions, see Dem. 19.287. See Frontisi-Ducroux (1992), 250 on the way in which these masks instilled a sense of the uniformity of religious behaviour. On the role of masks outside of the theatre more generally, see Wyles (2020), 125–34.

probably only a few types of masks; there was not a specific ‘Agamemnon’ mask and another ‘Oedipus’ one.<sup>85</sup> The audience therefore had to judge characters, such as Agamemnon or Oedipus, according to their actions and words, not their appearance. Similarly, there were a limited number of masks in Old and Middle Comedy.<sup>86</sup> By contrast, by the third century BCE, there were around forty-four types of masks in New Comedy.<sup>87</sup> Only by then was it possible for a playwright to give an indication of a character’s *ethos* by means of appearance, choosing a particular mask by which to represent that character.<sup>88</sup>

Statesmen in Classical Greece were rarely represented at all in art, let alone differentiated one from another. In fifth-century BCE Athens, there were almost no statues of living statesmen, and only a few of dead ones. The posthumous statues of the tyrant-slayers, Harmodius and Aristogeiton, set up in 478/7 BCE, stood alone in the agora for just over eighty years, until the statues of Conon and Evagoras were set up in 394 BCE.<sup>89</sup> There was a political dimension to this absence. After the battle of Eion in 476/5 BCE, Cimon and the other victorious generals were not allowed to put up statues of themselves. According to Aeschines, the *demos* only permitted the victors to put up three stone Hermae. The generals were not even allowed to inscribe their names on the Hermae, since the *demos* wanted the inscription to seem to be in honour of the *demos*, not the generals (Aeschin. 3.183–84).<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Demosthenes commended the fact that after the Persian Wars the Athenians had not erected statues of Themistocles and Miltiades; Demosthenes said that these leaders had received enough honour merely by having been judged by the people to be preeminent (23.197–98).

Similarly, some Classical Greek authors may have actively excluded physical descriptions from their narratives because it would have seemed aristocratic to single out individuals for their looks. This political explanation of the absence of physical descriptions has merit, provided it is not taken too far. Xenophon, no ardent democrat, still did not describe the appearance of the Spartan King Agesilaus. Thucydides believed that Athens was only in name a democracy but was in fact led by its foremost citizen, Pericles (2.65.9), and yet Thucydides did not depict Pericles’ looks. These authors avoided physical descriptions not in order to adhere to a democratic ideology, but perhaps for a more passive reason. Athenian statesmen seem not to have circulated images of themselves across Attica. Such pictorial self-promotion in politics would probably have proven ineffective, too overt, too aristocratic.<sup>91</sup> This lack of pictorial self-promotion may have meant that appearances did not become a topic of political debate, and so authors did not necessarily engage with the topic, no matter these authors’ political leanings.

<sup>85</sup> See Wiles (1991), 68. See also Jones (1971), 59: ‘the actor-mask is not a portrait, not a likeness; it presents, it does not re-present; it gives us King Oedipus.’

<sup>86</sup> See Vout (2022), 77 and Wiles (1991), 153. One caveat is that in Old Comedy, the possibility is at least entertained of having a mask reproduce the appearance of an individual; see Aristophanes, *Knights* 230, on which see Webster (1956b), 59–60 and Piqueux (2022), 75, 86.

<sup>87</sup> See Pollux, *Onomastikon* 4.143–54.

<sup>88</sup> See Webster (1956a), 136–38; Evans (1969), 38; Wiles (1991), 69.

<sup>89</sup> See Stewart (1979), 116–24 and Dillon (2006), 101.

<sup>90</sup> See also Plut., *Cim.* 8.1.

<sup>91</sup> In *Them.* 22.2, Plutarch writes that Themistocles erected a statue of himself in the temple of Artemis Aristoboule and was ostracised shortly thereafter.

Physical descriptions, absent from Classical Greece's political discourse, may have instead been associated with the private sphere. It was suggested above that, in Plato's dialogues, Socrates' ugly appearance challenged Socrates' interlocutors to confront both the gap between the apparent and the real, and the problem of how to reach the latter via the former. In Classical Greek prose, the attention placed on Socrates' physiognomy was unique. But it was not just Socrates' physiognomy that was described in these dialogues. Socrates' bodily actions were depicted: Phaedo describes how Socrates sat up on his couch, bent his leg and rubbed it, before beginning to speak (*Phaedo* 60b). So too, there are physical descriptions of other interlocutors: Plato writes that Lysis blushed when he began to speak (*Lysis* 213d).<sup>92</sup> One reason for the inclusion of some of these physical descriptions in philosophy may have been the setting of the dialogues. Plato and Xenophon normally recorded conversations held in private, for instance in someone's house, or in a public space, such as the street, but without a sizeable audience present. Perhaps authors tended to portray appearances of individuals when those individuals were in such intimate settings.<sup>93</sup>

If one's appearance was treated as part of one's private life, or as the type of thing an author mentioned when the individual being described was among small groups of people, then this may help explain why Thucydides did not describe Alcibiades' or Pericles' appearance. Classical Greek historians (orators and biographers albeit less so) tended to overlook the private lives of individual statesmen. Thucydides did not write of Alcibiades in a symposium or Pericles in a conversation with friends. Appearances were perhaps ignored in historiography, since the portrayal of appearances was associated with a discourse situated in a different setting.<sup>94</sup> The Hellenistic monarchs probably forced a reconfiguration of this public-private division. For Alexander the Great and his Successors, political decisions were conducted not in public arenas. Alexander's private life was also his public life; his conversation with friends was high politics. When recording Alexander's deeds, historians wrote about his actions and conversations in settings not commonly described in Classical Greek historiography. Perhaps as a result, historians of Alexander, at least as relayed by our later sources, recorded Alexander's intimate conversations, drinking habits, bodily actions, and appearance.<sup>95</sup>

In other ways, as well, the visual culture of Classical Greece was inverted in the Hellenistic Period: statesmen started to be depicted across visual media, and their depictions were often individualised. Alexander the Great promoted the dissemination of his image.<sup>96</sup> According to Plutarch, Alexander ensured that only Lysippus was allowed to sculpt his likeness (*Alexander* 4.1).<sup>97</sup> Hellenistic kings were depicted on the obverse of

<sup>92</sup> On this passage, see Goldhill and von Reden (1999), 287; on blushes in Plato, see Gooch (1987/88).

<sup>93</sup> Philosophers did sometimes portray Socrates' appearance in public settings; see the discussion above on Xen., *Apology* 27.

<sup>94</sup> Prior to the emergence of the *polis*, there was not the same division between private and public. This may help contextualise the presence of physical descriptions in Homer.

<sup>95</sup> See, e.g., Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.25–26.

<sup>96</sup> See Smith (1988), 9–10 on the different artistic representations of Alexander the Great mentioned by literary sources; Smith suggests that these representations were court commissions.

<sup>97</sup> See also Pliny, *HN* 7.38.

coins (in Classical Greece, gods and heroes were depicted on coins but never statesmen).<sup>98</sup> The images of these rulers could be personalised. On his coins, Euthydemus I of Bactria was given a distinctive appearance, and he was shown differently in youth and old age on coins dating between 230 and 200 BCE (see figs. 2, 3).<sup>99</sup> Retrospectively, fourth-century statesmen were also portrayed with markedly individualising features. The statue of Demosthenes (fig. 4), put up in the 280s BCE, shows furrowed brows in a manner not seen in earlier statuary. Once statesmen's images became individualised and publicised, these images entered the political conversation, and perhaps as a result authors became prone to describe and analyse physical appearances.<sup>100</sup>



*Fig. 2. Silver tetradrachm of young Euthydemus I, c. 230–220 BCE. © CoinIndia.*

<sup>98</sup> See Kroll (2007), 113–14.

<sup>99</sup> See Smith (1988), 113–14.

<sup>100</sup> Technical physiognomic treatises also began to appear in the Hellenistic Period: see [Arist.], *Physiognomica* and lost treatises by Cleanthes and Loxus, on which see Evans (1969), 11 and Gleason (1995), 30. These treatises attempted to infer character traits from static bodily features and bodily actions; see Cairns (2005), 127. It could be hypothesised that these treatises inaugurated, or were a sign of, a new interest in the appearance of the human body, and that this led to the increased attention placed on the body, whether static or in motion, in historiography, oratory, and biography. New to the Hellenistic Period was the systematisation of physiognomy; an untechnical interest in physiognomy was found already in Homer, for instance in the Thersites passage discussed above.



*Fig. 3. Silver tetradachm of old Euthydemus I, c. 220–200 BCE. © CoinIndia.*



*Fig. 4. Statue of Demosthenes, c. 280 BCE. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.  
Photograph by M.-L. Nguyen, CC BY 4.0 Deed.*

The looks of statesmen were also individualised and publicly displayed in the Roman Republic. Roman *imagines* (ancestral masks) were, aesthetically, the opposite of the



depersonalised Classical Greek masks. According to Polybius, when a Roman of curule rank died, his face was accurately reproduced in the form of a wax mask (6.53.5). On the occasion of public sacrifices, an illustrious family's *imagines* were brought out of the private home and displayed (6.53.6). In funeral processions, people most similar to the deceased in size and general form (κατά τε τὸ μέγεθος καὶ τὴν ἄλλην περικοπήν, 6.53.6) were chosen to wear the *imagines*. Diodorus writes that the one wearing the recently-deceased's *imago* even replicated the gait of that person (31.25.2). Central to these rituals was the understanding that *imagines* should accurately reproduce the looks of the deceased, that one *imago* should be distinguishable from the next, and that the deceased person's physiognomy should be reproduced not just facially but also bodily.<sup>101</sup> These funeral masks may even have been the precursor to veristic Roman portraiture, which was known for its representation of personal, individualising features.<sup>102</sup> The individuality of the shapes and expressions of faces in Late Republican portraiture can be seen by comparing, for instance, the portraits of Pompey and Crassus (figs. 5, 6).<sup>103</sup>

In the Roman Republic, statesmen signalled that their looks were an important component of their political identity. A line from the epitaph of Lucius Cornelius Scipio Barbatus, consul in 298 BCE and censor in 280 BCE, reads: *quoius forma virtutei parisuma fuit* (CIL VI 1285) ('whose appearance was most in keeping with his virtue'). According to the inscription, Scipio's *forma* reflected his *virtus*. So too, Scipio's *cognomen*, Barbatus ('Bearded'), was about his physical appearance. Over one-third of all known Roman *cognomina* referred to appearances.<sup>104</sup> By contrast, rarely in Classical Greece did a name relate to a physical attribute.<sup>105</sup> In Rome, politicians displayed their wounded bodies, treating them as physical manifestations of their virtue; according to Sallust, Marius said that his scars were his *imagines* (*Jug.* 85.30).<sup>106</sup> This display of the body was not a feature of political performance in Classical Greece.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>101</sup> On the appearance of *imagines*, see Flower (1996), 36–40.

<sup>102</sup> See Pollini (2012), 39 on the way in which Roman *imagines* played a central role in the creation of veristic Roman portraiture. See Fejfer (2008), 264 on the individualising aesthetic of both Roman portraiture and *imagines*.

<sup>103</sup> See Zanker (1988), 9: 'at no other time in the ancient world did portraiture capture so much of the personality of the subject.' On whether there is a connection between 'veristic' Roman portraiture and individualising Hellenistic art, see Flaig (1993), 207–08 *contra* Zanker (1988), 19.

<sup>104</sup> The next most common category, which referred to one's geographic origin, made up only around one-seventh of all *cognomina*; see Cook (2016), 35. The figures Cook cites are compiled by Kajanto (1965), 130.

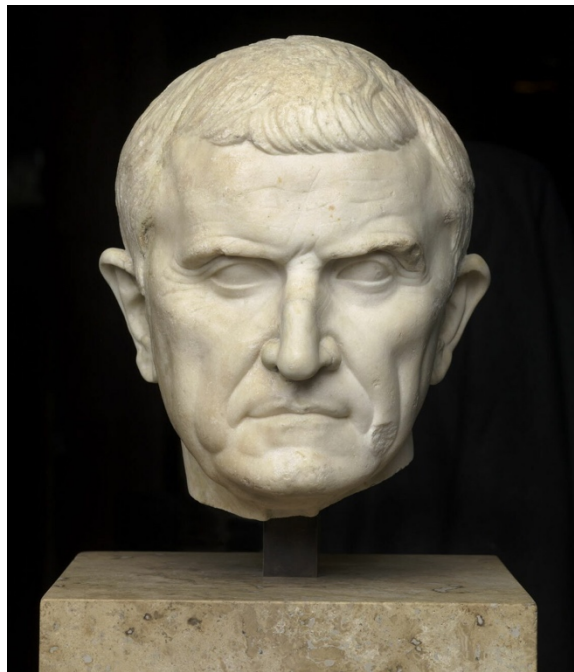
<sup>105</sup> Flaig (1993), 208 n.50 argues that it was unthinkable to include physiognomic features in the names of Classical or Hellenistic Greeks. This point should be slightly tempered: there were such names in Hellenistic Greece, such as Antigonus 'Monophthalmus' ('the one-eyed') and Ptolemy 'Physkon' ('the pot-bellied'), but not in Classical Greece.

<sup>106</sup> See also Sallust *Hist.* 1.76; Cic., *Verr.* 2.5.3, *De Or.* 2.195; Livy, 6.20.8, *Per.* 70; Plut., *Coriolanus* 14.1, *Aem.* 31.5, *Mar.* 9.2, *Mor.* 276c–d; Quint. 2.5.17. On the link between bodily display and popular rhetoric, see Leigh (1995).

<sup>107</sup> In *Mem.* 3.4.1, Xenophon writes that a man revealed his wounds, but in a private setting, not as a public demonstration of his courage. See too Xen., *Ages.* 6.2: Agesilaus does not undress to display his body, but his wounds are nevertheless visible.



*Fig. 5. Portrait of Pompey, c. 50 BCE. Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek, Copenhagen.  
Photograph by S. Sosnovskiy, CC BY-SA 4.0 Deed.*



*Fig. 6. Portrait of M. Crassus triumvir, mid-first century BCE. © 2010 RMN-Grand  
Palais (musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski.*

In sum, unlike statesmen in later time periods, Classical Greek statesmen did not actively circulate images of themselves as part of their political messaging. So too, Classical Greek artists rarely depicted these statesmen. The people who were depicted in art were normally given a standardised appearance. Classical Greek historians, biographers, orators, and authors of rhetorical treatises were therefore in line with the political culture and artistic tendencies of their time when they ignored the looks of statesmen or described them in non-specific ways. In Classical Greece, individual politicians were described, classified, and judged according to a wide range of criteria, but just not according to looks.

It is worth considering not just the reasons why so many Classical Greek prose authors did not depict the looks of statesmen, but also this absence's implications for our understanding of Classical Greek politics. The role of the visual in Classical Greek politics was perhaps not what it is so often assumed to have been. It is well known that beauty was praised in Classical Greece. Male beauty contests (καλλιστεῖα) were held throughout Greece, and athletic beauty contests ('good-manliness' contests, εὐανδρία) at the Panathenaea in Athens. The word καλός is found inscribed next to figures of boys on Attic vases; beauty is lauded in poetry, philosophy, and treatises on love.<sup>108</sup> It is frequently taken for granted that appearances also mattered in Classical Greek politics. S. Dillon writes: "'Judgmental viewing'"—the interpretation of a person's physical appearance in ethical terms—played a central role in the decision-making process of democratic Athens.<sup>109</sup> One can imagine why this assumption seems credible, since Athenian citizens were constantly watching statesmen perform in public. However, hardly any Classical Greek prose authors described a person's physical appearance and then interpreted it in ethical terms, especially in the context of public decision-making processes. In Athens, appearances were seen but not described.

P. Zanker makes a similar argument to that of S. Dillon: 'from Archaic times on, the true meaning of a figure was contained in the body. It was the body that expressed a man's physical and ethical qualities, that celebrated his physical and spiritual perfection and beauty, the *kalokagathia*.'<sup>110</sup> However, only once in Classical Greek literature does the adjective καλοκάγαθός refer straightforwardly to physical appearance. In this case, the word is used to describe a group, not an individual (Aeschines imagines that Timarchus might say that everyone prays that their children, when born, will be beautiful and good in appearance).<sup>111</sup> Otherwise, the noun καλοκάγαθία and its adjectival form καλοκάγαθός

<sup>108</sup> For the praise of beauty in Pindar's poetry, see *Pyth.* 10.55–59; *Ol.* 10.99–105; fr. 123; see Plato's *Symposium* for different definitions of physical and metaphysical beauty; for appearances in treatises on love, see [Dem.] 61.10–13. For the different types of beauty depending on one's stage of life, see Arist., *Rhet.* 1361b. See Fisher (2014), 251, 255 for further Classical Greek passages about beauty. For καλός inscribed on vases, see Fisher (2014), 253. On the various beauty contests held in Classical Greece, see Crowther (2004), 333–39; for ancient accounts of εὐανδρία contests, see *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 2311 and Xen., *Mem.* 3.3.12–13.

<sup>109</sup> Dillon (2006), 61.

<sup>110</sup> Zanker (1995), 10. See also Meister (2012), 48, 271; Worman (2008), 168.

<sup>111</sup> Aeschin. 1.134.

denote someone's wealth, nobility, or morality, not fine physical appearance.<sup>112</sup> Xenophon explicitly states that *καλοκάγαθος* is not about physical beauty but about virtue (*Oec.* 6.14–17).<sup>113</sup> In Classical Greece, ugliness is not set up as the antonym of *καλοκάγαθος*.<sup>114</sup>

It is reasonably assumed—from the presence of the term *καλοκάγαθος*, the prevalence of political and theatrical performances, the appearance of beautiful (non-differentiated) figures in art, the jokes in Old Comedy, or the descriptions of Socrates' physiognomy in philosophy—that Classical Greek politicians were judged pictorially. However, most of the evidence points in the contrary direction. The evidence from Classical Greek historiography, biography, oratory, and rhetorical treatises, paired with the evidence from visual media (Classical Greek art, coins, and theatrical masks), suggest that the Classical ideal of beauty was not a political virtue. Unlike in time periods earlier and later, in Classical Greece the gestures and looks of statesmen were not part of the political discourse. On Athens' Pnyx, politics and public performance were inseparable.<sup>115</sup> At the same time, the descriptions of these performances avoided the physical. According to Thucydides, Cleon accused the Athenian assembly-goers of being spectators of speeches (*θεαταὶ μὲν τῶν λόγων*, 3.38.4). This statement captures the way in which the performative was twinned with the incorporeal. According to Cleon, Athenians were watching not the orators' bodies and faces but their words.

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<sup>112</sup> See de Ste Croix (1972), 371–76.

<sup>113</sup> There is a connection drawn between physical beauty and *καλοκάγαθία* in Xen., *Hell.* 5.3.9, as suggested by Reid (2022), 124.

<sup>114</sup> See Bourriot (1995), 91–92. In Archaic poetry, *καλός* when connected to *ἀγαθός* more straightforwardly refers to physical beauty; see Sappho fr. 50; see Donlan (1973), 367–68.

<sup>115</sup> See Goldhill (1999), 10.

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