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## **VISIBILITY**

## **Hair Loss as Facial Disfigurement in Ancient Rome?**

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Hair loss, whatever the cause, significantly affects an individual's appearance and, depending upon the individual (for example their sex, gender, age, health, livelihood), the ramifications of it can be more or less severe. The United Kingdom's National Health Service's statistics indicate that hair loss is an issue that affects both men and women in contemporary Britain. Around half of men experience male pattern baldness by the age of fifty, although it usually begins in the late twenties or early thirties, while women can experience temporary hair loss after childbirth and female pattern baldness after the menopause, usually in the early fifties, and this is known as androgenetic alopecia.<sup>1</sup> Another common type of premature hair loss, affecting one or two people in every 1000, is alopecia areata (loss of small patches of hair from the scalp or other parts of the body), which for the most part affects people between the ages of 15 and 29 and can lead to the more severe hair loss of alopecia totalis (total loss of scalp hair) and alopecia universalis (total loss of scalp and body hair).<sup>2</sup>

According to numerous works of ancient literature, hair loss was an issue that affected both men and women in the Roman republic and empire just as it affects both men and women today. While a certain degree of hair loss was recognized as being a normal part of the natural aging process, and thus something that the majority of men and women could anticipate experiencing at some point in their lives, during the Roman period the bald man or

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hair-loss/Pages/Introduction.aspx> [accessed December 2016].

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

woman was the butt of numerous jokes at best and subject to outright hostility at worst.<sup>3</sup> An individual so afflicted could expect to be subjected to public mockery and humiliation on a regular basis, no matter what their social status. It has been suggested that such behaviour was a means of bolstering group cohesion at the expense of the outsider, expiating fear and embarrassment and ensuring an outlet for sublimated aggression.<sup>4</sup> But why should bald people be seen as outsiders, objects of fear and embarrassment, and a trigger for sublimated aggression? This chapter will focus on premature hair loss, whatever the perceived cause might have been, arguing that to the Romans this was a type of facial disfigurement, and this disfigurement was viewed not only as a physical failing but also as a moral one, and conclude by examining a rare first person narrative account of living with such a condition in order to explore the unique perspective on living with facial disfigurement in antiquity that this work provides.<sup>5</sup>

### **Physical Appearance**

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<sup>3</sup> On the bald man as a figure of fun, see Mary Beard, *Laughter in Ancient Rome: On Joking, Tickling, and Cracking Up* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2014), 51, 132–3, 146.

<sup>4</sup> On public mockery and humiliation more generally, see R. Garland, ‘The Mockery of the Deformed and the Disabled in Graeco-Roman Culture’, in *Laughter Down the Centuries*, ed. S. Jäkel and A. Timonen (Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 1994), 74.

<sup>5</sup> Ancient accounts of impairment and/or disability written from the first-person perspective are exceedingly rare. For discussion, see J. Draycott, ‘The Lived Experience of Disability in Antiquity: a Case Study from Roman Egypt’, *Greece & Rome* 62.2 (2015): 189–205.

The ancient Roman conception of physical appearance was a conscious construction predicated upon the desire to fuse natural law with cultural practice.<sup>6</sup> The body was viewed as the place where nature and culture met, which made it a text to be deciphered and read.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, an individual's body was constantly subjected to scrutiny and judgements were constantly being made regarding it.<sup>8</sup> A naturally beautiful exterior was considered to reflect a morally sound interior. This was particularly important with regard to the practice of oratory; it was imperative that an orator's body was seen to represent the orator's virtue if his words were to be taken seriously.<sup>9</sup> The face was of particular importance: according to Cicero, nature

‘has so formed [a man's] features as to portray therein the character that lies hidden deep within him; for not only do the eyes declare with exceeding clearness the innermost feelings of our hearts, but also the countenance, as we Romans call it, which can be found in no living thing save man, reveals the character’.<sup>10</sup>

Ancient oratorical treatises taught individuals how to best present themselves, providing step by step instructions on how to correct any potentially problematic features of their

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<sup>6</sup> A. Corbeill, *Controlling Laughter: Political Humour in the Late Roman Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 15.

<sup>7</sup> C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 90.

<sup>8</sup> E. Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 70.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Cicero, *On the Laws* 1.27, trans. C. W. Keyes, Loeb Classical Library 213 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928).

appearance and manner, tending to start at the head and work downwards.<sup>11</sup> Deviations from what was considered the norm marked an individual out and rendered them ‘Other’. The severity of the deviation was less important than the fact of the deviation, and consequently it is difficult to establish a hierarchy of severity. Such deviations – often referred to pejoratively as deformities – were considered serious enough to potentially bar an individual from holding public office, and were certainly weaponized as a means of blackening someone’s character.<sup>12</sup> According to oratorical treatises, it was considered an acceptable rhetorical strategy to draw attention to an opponent’s appearance and use it against them, and this seems to have been common practice in the late republic and into the imperial period (i.e. the first century BCE to the first century CE).

According to Cicero, ‘in ugliness (*deformitatis*) too and in physical blemishes (*vitiorum*) there is good enough (*bella*) matter for jesting, but here as elsewhere the limits of licence are the main question’.<sup>13</sup> This is a deliberate juxtaposition of the ugly body and the pretty jokes that could be made at its expense, and a demonstration of Ciceronian wit and wordplay. There is a lot of supporting evidence for this practice in surviving works of late

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<sup>11</sup> See for example Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education* 11.3.70, tr. D. A. Russell, Loeb Classical Library 494 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> See for example the case of Marcus Sergius Silus who lost his right hand in the Second Punic War and was subsequently victimized by contemporaries who tried to exclude him from religious rites on the grounds of his impairment. His speech refuting their right to do so is discussed by Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7.28.104–5, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 352 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942).

<sup>13</sup> Cicero, *On the Orator* 2.239, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 348 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942).

republican literature, such as the poetry of Catullus.<sup>14</sup> Physical disparities were not considered to be accidents of nature, but rather the direct results of behaviour that was deviant in some way, whether one's own behaviour or the behaviour of one's ancestors.<sup>15</sup> The latter in particular are evident in the Roman institution of the *cognomen*, an extra personal name or nickname, as in the republican period it was frequently a pejorative reference to an aspect of an individual's physique, which in turn could be read as a pejorative reference to their character.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, physical differences were fair game for ancient orators and mockery of them was a common feature of ancient oratory; the orator wanted to prove the moral deviance of his opponent, win the argument and thus win the case. According to Cicero, '[one should speak of] his personal endowments, among which it is easiest to praise a handsome appearance, as providing a very great indication of virtue'.<sup>17</sup> The reverse was also true: a lack of physical beauty reflects a deficiency in virtue.

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<sup>14</sup> J.-P. Cèbe, 'Catulle et la physiognomie', *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres d'Aix* 43 (1967): 174–8.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 1.721b29–35, trans. A. L. Peck, Loeb Classical Library 366 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942); Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7.11.50 for the belief that impairments and disfigurements could be inherited. See also N. Vlahogiannis, 'Curing Disability', in *Health in Antiquity*, ed. H. King (London: Routledge, 2005), 180-191, for the suggestion that impairments were interpreted as divine punishment for transgression.

<sup>16</sup> Cicero, *On Invention* 2.28, trans. H. M. Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library 386 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949); Quintilian, *The Orator's Education* 1.4.25.

<sup>17</sup> Cicero, *Divisions of Oratory* 74, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 349 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942).

Cicero's defence speech *For Quintus Roscius*, one of his earliest extant orations, puts the strategies and techniques set out in his rhetorical treatise *On Rhetorical Invention* into practice.<sup>18</sup> He focuses on the plaintiff, Gaius Fannius, and invites his audience to compare the physical appearance of Quintus Roscius with that of Gaius Fannius, to Roscius' advantage.<sup>19</sup> Gaius Fannius seems to have voluntarily rendered himself bald through depilation, taking Roman grooming practices to extremes.<sup>20</sup> Of course, it is possible that Gaius Fannius had gone bald for other reasons and that Cicero claimed it was the result of depilation to blacken his character even further.<sup>21</sup> Cicero's descriptions of Roscius and Fannius must have been

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<sup>18</sup> Cicero, *On Invention* 1.34–6.

<sup>19</sup> Cicero, *Speech in Defence of Quintus Roscius the Comedian* 20 (trans. J. H. Freese, Loeb Classical Library 240, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930).

<sup>20</sup> For a similar accusation of extreme depilation, see Scipio Aemilianus' invective against Publius Sulpicius Gallus at Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 6.12.5, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 200 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927). For the Roman practice of depilation more generally, see Seneca, *Natural Questions* 1.16–17, trans. T. H. Corcoran, Loeb Classical Library 450 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Martial, *Epigrams* 3.74 and 10.65, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb Classical Library 94 and 95 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Athenaeus, *Dinner Sophists* 13.564f–5f, trans. S. D. Olson, Loeb Classical Library 327 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> On accusations of effeminacy as an attempt to blacken someone's character, see C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 65; M. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-presentation in Ancient Rome*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 67–70; C. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*



accurate; since both men would have been present when the speech was delivered, and thus visible to Cicero's audience.

As we have seen, physical appearance is due to a combination of nature and culture, and hair is a useful means of mediating between nature and culture, with the hair itself representing nature and the ways in which it is styled or treated representing culture.<sup>22</sup> Many Roman discussions of physical appearance paid particular attention to hair and an individual's hair was frequently utilized as a means of drawing conclusions about that individual's character and morals. But what if an individual had no hair? Could a lack of hair and the way in which this was treated likewise mediate between nature and culture?

### **Hair Loss**

In Graeco-Roman antiquity, while it was understood that some peoples, such as the Myconians, were naturally bald, it was recognized as early as the fourth century BCE that a certain degree of hair loss occurred as a part of the natural aging process.<sup>23</sup> The Greek

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 129–31. The line between effeminacy and urbanity was extremely thin, see Edwards, *Politics*, 67–8; this is explored in more depth in K. Olson, 'Masculinity, Appearance, and Sexuality: Dandies in Roman Antiquity', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 23.2 (2014): 182–205.

<sup>22</sup> M. M. Levine, 'The Gendered Grammar of Ancient Mediterranean Hair', in *Off with Her Head! The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture*, ed. H. Eilberg-Schwartz and W. Doniger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 87–8.

<sup>23</sup> On the Myconians, see Strabo, *Geography* 10.9, trans. H. L. Jones, Loeb Classical Library 211 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928); Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*

philosopher Aristotle, drawing on the humoral theory of balanced heat and cold, moisture and dryness in a healthy body, attributed this to the body's cooling and drying out.<sup>24</sup>

Consequently different parts of the head were considered to be more or less dry than others, based on the progression of the hair loss.<sup>25</sup> The same substance that was responsible for the growth of hair was thought to be responsible for the production of semen.<sup>26</sup> This led to numerous assumptions regarding who could suffer from hair loss: neither children, nor eunuchs, nor women should suffer from hair loss.<sup>27</sup> Hair was expected to be at its best during

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11.47, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 353 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940).

<sup>24</sup> Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 5.783b8–9, 5.784a–85a; Aristotle, *History of Animals* 3.11.518a 1–23, trans. A. L. Peck, Loeb Classical Library 437 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); Aristotle, *Problems* 17.26, trans. R. Mayhew, Loeb Classical Library 38 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *History of Animals* 3.11.518a; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 6.4-5, trans. R. A. Kaster, Loeb Classical Library 512 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 4.765b, 4.783b; Aristotle, *Problems* 10.24; *Greek Anthology* 11.190 and 11.368, trans. W. R. Paton, Loeb Classical Library 85 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918).

<sup>27</sup> Puberty: Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 5.783b8; Aristotle, *Problems* 4.4; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 11.47. Eunuchs: Hippocrates, *Aphorisms* 28, trans. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library 150 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931); Hippocrates, *Nature of the Child* 510, trans. P. Potter, Loeb Classical Library 520 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Aristotle, *Problems* 10.57; Aristotle, *History of Animals* 8.632a; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 11.47. Women: Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*

the prime of a man's life when he was at his physical peak.<sup>28</sup> Thus we see a connection being made between hair, masculinity and virility, a connection that would continue to be made throughout classical antiquity and into the fifth century CE.<sup>29</sup> Myths offered cautionary tales of men who lost their hair prematurely and subsequently lost their power and authority too.<sup>30</sup>

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5.783b; Aristotle, *Problems* 10.57; Aristotle, *History of Animals* 3.11.518a; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 11.47.

<sup>28</sup> Galen, *Mixtures* 2.621, trans. P. N. Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). While male hair loss and baldness in Graeco-Roman antiquity has not been extensively discussed, male hair loss and baldness in the Early Modern period has been explored in A. Korhonen, 'Strange Things Out of Hair: Baldness and Masculinity in Early Modern England', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 41.2 (2010): 371–91, with a focus on what this means for constructions of masculinity.

<sup>29</sup> Gleason, *Making Men*.

<sup>30</sup> See for example Pterelaus and Nisus and Apollodorus, *The Library* 2.4.7 and 3.15.8 respectively, trans. J. G. Frazer, Loeb Classical Library 121 and 122 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921); Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.1–151, trans. F. J. Miller, Loeb Classical Library 42 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916); Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers* 612–22, trans. A. H. Sommerstein, Loeb Classical Library 146 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Hyginus, *Fables* 198, 242, trans. M. Grant (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1960); Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.19.4, 2.34.7, trans. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library 93 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918); Propertius, *Elegies* 3.19.21–8, trans. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 18 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Vergil, *Georgics* 1.404–9, trans. H. R. Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

It was also recognized that once hair loss occurred as part of the natural aging process, hair was unlikely to grow back.<sup>31</sup> The Roman medical writer Celsus differentiated between hair loss as a result of illness and hair loss as a result of aging, suggesting remedies for the former but considering the latter incurable.<sup>32</sup> Hair loss as a part of the natural aging process was not necessarily viewed in a negative light, particularly not during the Roman republic and early empire, as age was valued for the wisdom and experience that it brought.<sup>33</sup> Thus we see honorific portrait busts of elderly men dating from the first century BCE that seem to emphasize the features of old age (see Figure 5.1).<sup>34</sup> This is referred to as the veristic style of Roman portraiture. A bald head is combined with wrinkles and a severe expression, all of which indicate *dignitas*, *gravitas* and *auctoritas*.

[INSERT FIGURE 5.1 ABOUT HERE]

What we do not see, however, are honorific portrait busts of younger men with bald heads. A young man who experienced premature hair loss, be it the result of male pattern baldness or illness, was not viewed in the same way as an old man who experienced hair loss as part of the aging process. A woman of any age who experienced hair loss, whatever the cause, was

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<sup>31</sup> Aristotle, *Categories* 10.13a, trans. H. P. Cooke and H. Tredennick, Loeb Classical Library 325 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938).

<sup>32</sup> Celsus, *On Medicine* 6.1, trans. W. G. Spencer, Loeb Classical Library 304 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938).

<sup>33</sup> See T. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 82–3 on baldness in old age viewed negatively; see K. Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 11–23 on baldness in old age viewed first negatively, and then positively.

<sup>34</sup> Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age*, 18–23.

also treated differently. This type of hair loss was in no way desirable. Perhaps this explains the context in which we do see portraits of younger men with bald heads. Baldness is the most common physical deviation depicted in portrait graffiti, and the frequency with which names accompany these drawings indicates that they were intended to represent real people (see Figure 5.2, the text says ‘*Rufus est*’, ‘this is Rufus’) and so be recognizable to the viewer.<sup>35</sup> It has been suggested that these drawings are an attempt at simplistic humour, a humour that is at its sharpest when it is directed at a specific person.<sup>36</sup> So we see another way in which bald people could be publicly mocked and potentially humiliated: a graffito was more durable and so could last far longer than a joke made at someone’s expense.

[INSERT FIGURE 5.2 ABOUT HERE]

There were many reasons why someone might lose their hair prematurely. However, frequently the loss of hair was viewed as something which the victim was directly responsible for, as certain types of behaviour were thought to cause hair loss. Some of this involved the hair directly and the loss of hair is an obvious and understandable consequence: plucking out grey hairs could lead to baldness, while dying grey or white hair in an attempt to disguise its colour could lead to all hair falling out.<sup>37</sup> In other cases, the connection between the

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<sup>35</sup> J. Clark, *Looking at Laughter: Humor, Power and Transgression in Roman Visual Culture, 100 B.C. -A.D. 250* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 45, states that a quarter of the examples have bald heads.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>37</sup> Plucking: Diodorus Siculus, *Library* 33.7.6-7, trans. F. R. Walton, Loeb Classical Library 423 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); Phaedrus, *Fables* 2.2, trans. B. E. Perry, Loeb Classical Library 436 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2.7, trans. R. A. Kaster, Loeb Classical Library 510 (Cambridge, MA:

behaviour and the hair loss is less clear with regard to cause and effect, but it seems to have involved excess, such as an excess of sexual activity or an excess of wine consumption.<sup>38</sup>

Consequently, those thought to be engaging in these types of behaviour and showing evidence of it were subjected to moralising and judgement. According to Seneca:

What wonder, then, that we can trip up the statement of the greatest and most skilled physician, when so many women are gouty and bald! Because of their vices, women have ceased to deserve the privileges of their sex; they have put off their womanly nature and are therefore condemned to suffer the diseases of men.<sup>39</sup>

This practice of drawing conclusions about an individual's behaviour and moral calibre from their physical appearance extended beyond casual inference, and was in fact a highly technical scientific discipline known as physiognomy.

### **Physiognomy**

It has been suggested that the practice of divination was a ubiquitous reflex in response to uncertainty.<sup>40</sup> Ancient Mediterranean society was a 'face-to-face' society, and in such a

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Harvard University Press, 2011). Dying: Ovid, *Amores* 1.14, trans. G. Showerman, Loeb Classical Library 41 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914); Martial, *Epigrams* 14.27.

<sup>38</sup> Sex: Aristotle, *Problems* 4.18. Wine consumption: Plutarch, *Table Talk* 652f, trans. P. A. Clement and H. B. Hoffleit, Loeb Classical Library 424 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 6.11.

<sup>39</sup> Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 95.21, trans. R. M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library 77 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).

<sup>40</sup> M. Gleason, 'The Semiotics of Gender: Physiognomy and Self-Fashioning in the Second Century AD', in *Before Sexuality*, ed. D. Halperin, J. Winkler and F. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 389.

society scrutiny of one's fellow man was an essential survival skill.<sup>41</sup> The discipline of physiognomy, a set of techniques which attempted to assess a person's personality and the nature of their character through the observation of their physical characteristics and behaviour, drawing on beliefs regarding the interdependence of the soul and the body, was one way in which this scrutiny could be exercised. According to pseudo-Aristotle:

‘Among things that come about by nature one might especially see that the body and soul are connate with each other to the extent that in the case of most affections they are causally active on each other. No animal has ever been born that has the appearance of one animal but the mind of another, but soul and body are always of the same animal – so that, necessarily, such-and-such a mind follows such-and-such a body’.<sup>42</sup>

The specifics of ancient Greek and Roman physiognomic techniques are attested by several surviving treatises: pseudo-Aristotle's, once thought to be authored by Aristotle but now dated to the third century BCE; Polemon's, written between 133 and 136 CE and later adapted by Adamantius; a Latin work once attributed to Apuleius now dated to the second half of the fourth century CE; and a Byzantine adaptation of Adamantius. It is likely that many more circulated and simply do not survive. It is also likely that there were considerably more practitioners than theorists, operating at all levels of ancient society.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Pseudo-Aristotle, *Physiognomics* 1 (trans. S. Swain, in S. Swain, ‘Appendix: The Physiognomy Attributed to Aristotle’, in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. S. Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 637–61.

It is clear from the content of the surviving treatises that the head was particularly important in physiognomy. This could be attributed to the fact that it was the most consistently visible part of the human body and was crucial in personal interaction. As a result, an individual's hair was worthy of attention. For Polemon, lacking hair was indicative of treachery and wickedness of action.<sup>43</sup> For Adamantius, baldness was a sign of malice and deceit.<sup>44</sup> It has been observed that elderly individuals were at a distinct disadvantage when subjected to physiognomic analysis, and certainly their tendency towards hair loss would be part of this.<sup>45</sup> At even more of a disadvantage were young men who had suffered premature hair loss as they did not have the excuse of old age to explain the loss away, which would lead observers to seek an alternative explanation or draw their own conclusions regarding it.

The Roman historians and biographers of the late first and early second century CE utilized certain aspects of physiognomic theory in their writings as a means of elucidating the true natures of influential individuals, and this is particularly apparent in relation to the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors.<sup>46</sup> The emperors are the Romans about whose physical

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<sup>43</sup> Polemon, *Physiognomy* 40, trans. R. Hoyland, in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. S. Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 329–463.

<sup>44</sup> Adamantius, *Physiognomy* B37, trans. I. Repath, in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. S. Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 487–547.

<sup>45</sup> Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age*, 12–15.

<sup>46</sup> For a survey of the physical appearances of the Roman emperors from the first century BCE to the fourth century CE, see H. V. Canter, 'Personal Appearance in the Biography of the Roman Emperors', *Studies in Philology* 25.3 (1928): 385–99; E. Evans, 'Roman



appearances we have the most comprehensive information, both written descriptions and (presumably) somewhat accurate portraits. Suetonius' *Twelve Caesars*, a collection of biographies of the first twelve Roman emperors, contains detailed descriptions of each of them. Suetonius' decision to include these descriptions has been linked to his knowledge of the ancient discipline of physiognomy, with which his sophisticated readers would also have been familiar.<sup>47</sup> Hair – or lack of hair – is a prominent feature of each description. It is, however, the emperors that lost their hair prematurely that concern us here, as the comments made regarding this give us an insight into how premature hair loss was viewed, which seems to have been as a type of facial disfigurement: Julius Caesar, Gaius (Caligula), Galba and Domitian are all described as suffering from hair loss.<sup>48</sup> According to Suetonius, Caesar's

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Descriptions of Personal Appearance in History and Biography', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 46 (1935): 43–84; A. E. Wardman, 'Description of Personal Appearance in Plutarch and Suetonius: The Use of Statues as Evidence', *Classical Quarterly* 17 (1967): 414–20.

<sup>47</sup> B. Gladhill, 'The Emperor's No Clothes: Suetonius and the Dynamics of Corporeal Euphrasis', *Classical Antiquity* 31.2 (2012): 315–48; D. Rohrbacher, 'Physiognomics in Imperial Latin Biography', *Classical Antiquity* 29.1 (2010): 92–116; A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars* (London: Duckworth, 1983), 196. Suetonius is also known to have written a treatise, now lost, called *On Physical Defects*.

<sup>48</sup> Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 45, and *Gaius* 50, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 31 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914); Suetonius, *Galba* 21 and *Domitian* 18, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 38 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914). The emperor Otho is described as wearing a wig that was of such high quality that no one

‘baldness was a disfigurement (*deformatem*) which troubled him greatly, since he found that it was often the subject of the gibes of his detractors’.<sup>49</sup> While Suetonius does not specify how old Caesar was when the hair loss first occurred, he was apparently mocked for it by his own soldiers during the triumph for his conquests in Gaul, which took place when he was fifty-four.<sup>50</sup> The fact that Caesar himself apparently considered the loss of his hair as detrimental to his looks, and went to some trouble to attempt to disguise this loss, first through a comb over and then through wearing a laurel wreath, despite the positive connotations of hair loss for an older man demonstrates how negatively premature hair loss was viewed. The emperor Gaius, assassinated at the age of twenty-nine, seems to have suffered from almost total hair loss.<sup>51</sup> According to Suetonius, Gaius’ ‘hair [was] thin and entirely gone on the top of his head, though his body was hairy. Because of this to look upon him from a higher place as he passed by ... was treated as a capital offence’.<sup>52</sup> This description is confirmed by Seneca, a contemporary of Gaius, who observed that

amid the multitude of his other vices [he] had a bent for insult [and] was moved by the strange desire to brand every one with some stigma, while he himself was a most fruitful source of ridicule; such was the ugliness of his pale face bespeaking his

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knew he suffered from thinning hair until after his death, Suetonius, *Otho* 12, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 38 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).

<sup>49</sup> Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 45.

<sup>50</sup> Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 51.

<sup>51</sup> Suetonius, *Gaius* 59.

<sup>52</sup> Suetonius, *Gaius* 50.

madness, such the wildness of his eyes lurking beneath the brow of an old hag, such the hideousness (*deformitas*) of his bald head with its sprinkling of beggarly hairs.<sup>53</sup>

However, it is the description given by Suetonius of the final emperor in the sequence, Domitian, that is particularly interesting in relation to his premature hair loss:

He was handsome and graceful too, especially when a young man, and indeed in his whole body with the exception of his feet, the toes of which were somewhat cramped. In later life he had the further disfigurement (*deformis*) of baldness, a protruding belly, and spindling legs, though the latter had become thin from a long illness.<sup>54</sup>

How accurate was Suetonius' description? Just how bald was Domitian? And to what extent was this baldness seen as disfiguring?

The emperors of the Flavian dynasty favoured a more realistic style of portraiture than their Julio-Claudian predecessors, harking back to veristic Republican portraiture. Consequently, it is possible to observe a tendency toward male pattern baldness in the Flavian family.<sup>55</sup> While this seems to have been less of an issue with regard to the founder of the dynasty Vespasian, who was sixty years old at the time of his acclamation and therefore could hardly be said to have been suffering from premature hair loss, it is something that seems to have bothered his sons. The portraits of Titus, although difficult to date precisely because he died two years into his

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<sup>53</sup> Seneca, *On Firmness* 18.1, trans. J. W. Basore, Loeb Classical Library 214 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).

<sup>54</sup> Suetonius, *Domitian* 18.1.

<sup>55</sup> S. Wood, 'Public Images of the Flavian Dynasty: Sculpture and Coinage', in *A Companion to the Flavian Age of Imperial Rome*, ed. A. Zissos (Chichester/Malden: John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2016), 130.

reign at the age of 41, show his hair receding at the temples and brushed forward to cover a bald spot on the crown of the head.<sup>56</sup> The portraits of Domitian that date from his father's reign show him as a young man with a full head of hair, while his mature portraits, like his brother's, show his hairline gradually receding, his hair thinning, and longer strands of hair at the back of his head combed forward and arranged in an attempt to disguise this.<sup>57</sup> Thus we have evidence not only of Domitian's baldness, but also his attempts to hide it. The Latin word used by Suetonius to describe Domitian's baldness is *deformis*, which can be translated literally as 'misshapen', 'deformed', 'unsightly', 'ugly', 'odious', 'disgusting', or 'disgraceful', and figuratively as 'departing either physically or morally from the right shape or quality'. Behind this stands the idea of a norm from which some sort of deviation has occurred.<sup>58</sup> Concurrently words denoting moral character often refer to an implied norm of perfection and balance.<sup>59</sup> For Domitian, as for the other 'bad' emperors, it was all downhill. He started off beautiful but losing his hair meant that, like Julius Caesar, he lost his beauty, but potentially also his virtue. In point of fact, Suetonius devotes a significant amount of space to Domitian's virtues and vices, and the way that the balance of these shifted over the course of his reign.<sup>60</sup>

According to Suetonius, and perhaps unsurprisingly considering the emphasis placed upon physical appearance by the Romans, Domitian 'was so sensitive about his baldness, that

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>58</sup> Corbeill, *Controlling Laughter*, 34.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Suetonius, *Domitian* 3.2; see also B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London: Routledge, 1992); P. Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant* (London: Routledge, 1997)

he regarded it as a personal insult if anyone else was twitted with that defect in jest or in earnest'.<sup>61</sup> The extent to which this was true has been debated.<sup>62</sup> An inability to tolerate jokes made at one's expense is a key indicator of a 'bad' emperor, and so it is not surprising that Suetonius would use it here.<sup>63</sup> As we have seen, bald people were the butt of numerous jokes both in relation to their baldness and their attempts to hide it, so it is feasible that Domitian was exposed to some of this even if he was not the one on the receiving end of it.<sup>64</sup> Yet the poet Martial mocked men and women suffering from premature hair loss in numerous epigrams, and did so during Domitian's reign and in a book of poetry dedicated to him, which it is likely that Domitian was at least aware of, even if he did not read the poems himself.<sup>65</sup> The fact that Martial does not seem to have suffered any kind of punishment or penalty for his mockery indicates that Domitian was not overly sensitive about his baldness. That is not to say that he was not distressed by it. In a book *On the Care of the Hair*, which he published and dedicated to a friend, he wrote the following by way of consolation to the man and himself: 'Do you not see that I am too tall and comely to look on? And yet the same fate

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<sup>61</sup> Suetonius, *Domitian* 18.2.

<sup>62</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 31 believes it is true. Southern, *Domitian*, 119 does not.

<sup>63</sup> Beard, *Laughter in Ancient Rome*, 132; on Suetonius' 'concealed invective', see T. Barton, *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics, and Medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

<sup>64</sup> See for example *Philogelos* 56, trans. B. Baldwin (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1983).

<sup>65</sup> Southern, *Domitian*, 119.

awaits my hair, and I bear with resignation the ageing of my locks in youth. Be assured that nothing is more pleasing than beauty, but nothing shorter-lived'.<sup>66</sup>

This last line is a reference to the Greek hero Achilles, an individual famous for his glorious hair and frequently placed in opposition to another character from the *Iliad*, Thersites, due to the extreme differences in their physical appearances.<sup>67</sup> This anecdote gives us an insight into the response of a Roman man to premature hair loss. It is clear that Domitian, despite his high status and the unlikelihood that anyone would have dared to comment on his hair loss to his face, was bothered by it and his unnamed friend was likewise bothered about his hair loss. Hence Domitian's treatise, an attempt to console the pair of them through rationalizing that hair loss was part of the aging process was inevitable, but ironically resulting in Domitian

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<sup>66</sup> Suetonius, *Domitian* 18.2. See also L. Morgan, 'Hair and Heroism According to Domitian', *Classical Quarterly* 47.1 (1997): 209–14; K. M. Coleman, 'The Emperor Domitian and Literature', *ANRW* 2<sup>nd</sup> series 32.5 (1986): 3087–3115.

<sup>67</sup> Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions* 1065C, trans. H. Cherniss, Loeb Classical Library 470 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976). On Thersites' physical appearance, see Homer, *Iliad* 2.211–77, trans. A. T. Murray, Loeb Classical Library 170 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924); Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.2.10, trans. W. C. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library 218 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928); Plutarch, *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* 35c, trans. F. C. Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library 197 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927). See also Martial, *Epigrams* 12.82 for an account of the sycophant Menogenes complimenting a virtually bald man on his luxurious head of hair and resultant resemblance to Achilles.

being remembered specifically for it.<sup>68</sup> It is clear from surviving medical and cosmetic treatises that people went to considerable lengths to maintain their hair.<sup>69</sup> If they were unsuccessful in these endeavours, they could utilize paint, hair pieces, wigs and headdresses in an attempt to disguise their loss.<sup>70</sup> They could even offer prayers and *ex votos* in an attempt to engage the help of the gods in reversing it.<sup>71</sup> Such a purpose has been suggested for an unusual *ex voto* recovered from a ritual deposit on the Esquiline Hill, perhaps originally from

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<sup>68</sup> See Juvenal, *Satires* 4.37–8, trans. S. M. Braund, Loeb Classical Library 91 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) and Ausonius, *Twelve Caesars* 2.10–12, trans. H. G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library 96 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919) for Domitian being referred to by his subjects as ‘bald Nero’.

<sup>69</sup> On hair-loss: Celsus, *On Medicine* 6.4; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 28.163–6, trans. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library 418 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); Galen 12.403–05 K, in *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia* Volume 12, trans. K. G. Kühn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Aëtius, *Sixteen Books on Medicine* 6.65, trans. A. Olivieri (Berlin: Corpus Medicorum Graecorum, 1935); Paul of Aegina, *Medical Compendium in Seven Books* 3.1.1–2, trans. F. Adams (London: The Sydenham Society, 1844); on encouraging hair-growth: Galen 13.432–4 K, in *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia* Volume 13, trans. K. G. Kühn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>70</sup> J. Draycott, ‘Prosthetic Hair in Ancient Rome?’ in *Prostheses in Antiquity*, ed. J. Draycott (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

<sup>71</sup> J. Draycott, ‘Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow: The Use of Real, False and Artificial Hair as Votive Offerings’ in *Bodies of Evidence: The Anatomical Votive Past, Present and Future*, ed. J. Draycott and E.-J. Graham (London: Routledge, 2017), 77–94.

the temple of Minerva Medica in Rome; it has been proposed that it depicts an individual suffering from alopecia areata (see Figure 5.3).<sup>72</sup>

[INSERT FIGURE 5.3 ABOUT HERE]

But just why was the presence of hair so important? And could the loss of it be overcome? In attempt to understand why premature hair loss was considered to be a form of facial disfigurement by the ancient Romans, the remainder of this chapter will examine two ancient treatises, one devoted to hair, and the other, written in reply to the first, devoted to baldness.

### **Dio Chrysostom's *In Praise of Hair* and Synesius' *In Praise of Baldness***

The two treatises in question are examples of a literary genre known as the encomium. Encomia were originally written for the purpose of praising the virtuous actions or other good qualities of a particular individual. However, the genre evolved over time and versions known as paradoxical encomia came to be written for the purpose of praising objects and inanimate beings, things not normally considered worthy of praise, and the two treatises to be examined fall into this latter category as neither hair nor baldness would, in all seriousness, have been considered worthy subjects for such a treatment.<sup>73</sup> Thus, their authors had the unenviable job of needing to justify their chosen subjects and essentially make them worthy of praise through the process of praising them. Successfully doing so would have been seen as proof of the writers' abilities and so would have enhanced their reputations. Texts like

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<sup>72</sup> M. D. Grmek and D. Gourevitch, *Les maladies dans l'art antique* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 345–6.

<sup>73</sup> Such treatises were also published in Early Modern England, Korhonen, 'Strange Things', 388–90.



these were ‘designed for the pleasure and amusement of the audience, full of flashy, witty arguments and clever turns of phrase’.<sup>74</sup> On the one hand, how seriously we should take either of these works is debatable due to the nature of the genre and its purpose. On the other, the fact that the works would have been performed in public as a demonstration of oratorical expertise indicates that there is at least some truth in the points that they make.

The first encomium is Dio Chrysostom’s *In Praise of Hair*, and it survives in a fragmentary form because it was replied to some three hundred years later by Synesius in his encomium *In Praise of Baldness*. Dion Cocceianus (*circa* 40 – after 111 CE), also known as Dio Chrysostom (‘Golden-mouth’ because of his eloquence), was an orator and philosopher who came from a wealthy family from the city of Prusia in the Roman province of Bithynia. He wrote ‘display pieces’ typical of the Second Sophistic on a variety of popular themes which he would have delivered in person as a means of informing, improving and entertaining a variety of audiences while he travelled around the empire. His work is considered to reflect the attitudes and culture of the upper classes of the eastern half of the empire. He was banished from Rome by the emperor Domitian in the year 82 CE, a banishment not rescinded until the accession of the emperor Nerva in 96 CE, and it is tempting to link Dio’s decision to write on this subject to Domitian’s hair loss and a desire to wreak revenge, however small, on him for the banishment (assuming, of course, that Dio writing the treatise was not the reason he was banished in the first place).

Dio’s work is described by Synesius as being ‘so brilliant that the bald man, in the face of its arguments, must be covered with shame’.<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately, the treatise does not

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<sup>74</sup> S. Goldhill, ‘Rhetoric and the Second Sophistic’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric*, ed. E. Gunderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 232.

<sup>75</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.1.1, trans. A. Fitzgerald (London: Oxford University Press, 1930).

survive in its entirety, but the sections that do survive are useful to contemporary readers attempting to understand Roman attitudes to hair. In the surviving fragments, Dio focuses on male hair specifically, and uses the examples of the 300 Spartans and the Homeric heroes to argue that hair makes a man both beautiful and terrifying, and is indicative of masculinity and virility.<sup>76</sup> The examples would have been extremely familiar to Dio's audience, the highly educated Greek elite of the eastern Roman empire.<sup>77</sup> Dio's contemporary Plutarch wrote a treatise about the Spartans and discussed their grooming practices particularly in relation to how they differed to Athenian ones.<sup>78</sup> The Spartans wore their hair long while the Athenians, except for a small number of mostly young men who deliberately aped Spartan styles and were consequently known as 'Laconizers', wore theirs short.<sup>79</sup> For the Spartans, hair was emblematic of maturity and all of the responsibilities that came with it; boys' heads would be shaved around the age of twelve, prior to puberty, and then, around the age of twenty, once

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<sup>76</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.3.3–9; on the 300 Spartans, see Herodotus, *Histories* 7.208–09, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 119 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922); on the Homeric heroes, see for example Homer, *Iliad* 3.43 specifically on the Achaeans.

<sup>77</sup> On Greek education during the Roman period, see R. Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind. Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>78</sup> Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 22.1, trans. B. Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 46 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).

<sup>79</sup> D. Leitao, 'Adolescent Hair-growing and Hair-cutting Rituals in Ancient Greece: A Sociological Approach', in *Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals and Narratives: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. D. Dodd and C. A. Faraone (London: Routledge, 2003), 124–6.

they were considered to have reached manhood, they were permitted to grow their hair long. This long hair was linked directly with virility and other qualities desirous in a Spartan male, and was carefully groomed and styled before battle.<sup>80</sup>

Synesius (370–413 CE) came from a wealthy family from the city of Cyrene in the Roman province of Cyrenaica, and was supposedly descended from the Heraclidae, the legendary founders of the city.<sup>81</sup> He travelled in Greece and pursued his education in Alexandria, where he was a pupil of the philosopher Hypatia. He married a Christian and was appointed bishop of Ptolemais before converting to Christianity. *In Praise of Baldness*, written in reply to Dio's *In Praise of Hair* between 400 and 409CE, offers a unique testimony of the experience of suffering from the disfigurement of premature hair loss under the later Roman empire. Although both Dio's and Synesius' treatises can be seen as rhetorical exercises or even showcases, ways for the orators to display their eloquence, if we visualize Synesius delivering this work as a speech, it would be significantly less powerful were he to be delivering it with a full head of hair. If the point of the speech is to argue a case that the audience are inclined to take against from the start, and argue it so persuasively that the audience becomes convinced of the case's merit, then the entire argument would be undermined if the speaker were hirsute. Synesius himself comments on the difficulty of arguing such a case effectively, and even uses this as a means of denigrating Dio's rhetorical skill in comparison to his own.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Leitao, 'Adolescent Hair-growing', 119.

<sup>81</sup> On the life of Synesius, see J. Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene: Philosopher-Bishop* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>82</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.4.1–2; 4.1, 19.1.

Synesius' attempts to refute the arguments put forward by Dio provide an insight into the sorts of ways in which bald men were perceived specifically because of their hair loss, and it is clear that they were perceived to be disfigured. For baldness was not considered to be a natural state or even a state in its own right, rather it was always considered to be the absence of hair. He mentions the shame that a bald man feels on several occasions, and the reproaches that he receives from others because of his baldness.<sup>83</sup> The treatise also suggests how a bald man might respond to jokes made at his expense, and there is a clear element of verbal sparring and competition. He does confirm that the quality of an individual's hair contributes significantly to that individual's physical attractiveness: 'By nature we all desire to be beautiful – to which end, in large measure, the tresses with which Nature has rendered us familiar since childhood, contribute'.<sup>84</sup> This is particularly important when it comes to the opposite sex, and this is an interesting—and unusual—expression of the realities of female sexual desire.<sup>85</sup> He states that he is bald due to illness, but based on the selection of examples and arguments he uses, his treatise was not intended to be restricted to the temporarily bald. He argues that baldness is a sign of intelligence.<sup>86</sup> He uses the example of the philosophers

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<sup>83</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.1.1, 5.1, 24.2.

<sup>84</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.1.1.

<sup>85</sup> For the explicit linking of female sex appeal and hair, see Ovid, *Art of Love* 3.242–50, trans. J. H. Mozley, Loeb Classical Library 232 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929); Apuleius, *Metamorphosis* 2.8, trans. J. A. Hanson, Loeb Classical Library 44 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996). For discussion, see L. Sensi, 'Ornatus e status sociale delle donne romane', *Annali della Faculta di Lettere e Filosofia Perugia-Sezione Studi Classici* n.s. 4 (1980-1): 55–102.

<sup>86</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.5.1–5, 6.1–6.

Diogenes and Socrates, sculptures of whom he has observed.<sup>87</sup> He argues that, since priests frequently removed their body hair in pursuit of purity, baldness is a sign of purity.<sup>88</sup> He also discusses the shape of the bald head, likening it to a sphere, a shape long considered to have divine qualities.<sup>89</sup>

Perhaps most interestingly, and potentially controversially, Synesius argues against judging someone according to their appearance. This flies in the face of the discipline of physiognomy that had been so popular in earlier centuries. He feels that hair is praised by the ignorant and superficial, and this preference results in those with full heads of hair being represented in works of art where bald heads would be more appropriate.<sup>90</sup> However, elsewhere in the treatise he does engage with divination; he argues that hair is negative because the comet, with its hairy tail, is a negative portent.<sup>91</sup> This might be a reference to an anecdote regarding the emperor Vespasian found in Suetonius' *Twelve Caesars*. Apparently, when on his deathbed, Vespasian was informed of the appearance of a comet in the sky, a portent usually associated with the death of a ruler, he claimed it referred not to him, as he was bald, but to the king of the Parthians, who was long-haired.<sup>92</sup> He also associates baldness

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<sup>87</sup> P. Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 224.

<sup>88</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.5.6, 7.1–6, 8.1. Levine, 'Gendered Grammar', 86 suggests that 'ritual baldness' mimics the liminal states of infancy and old age.

<sup>89</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.8.1, 8.5.

<sup>90</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.9.2–3; 9.1, 10.1–3.

<sup>91</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.10.5.

<sup>92</sup> Suetonius, *Vespasian* 23, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 38 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914); Aurelius Victor, *On the Caesars* 9, trans. H. W. Bird

with the moon.<sup>93</sup> This seems to have been a common association; Varro recommends not cutting one's hair when the moon is waxing for fear of going bald, while Ausonius states that Mars loved the beardless while the Moon loved the bald.<sup>94</sup> He also observes that baldness has a role to play in the maintenance and restoration of health, as it is frequently recommended as a starting point for therapy.<sup>95</sup>

Synesius engages directly with the examples of famous hirsute individuals that Dio cites and refutes each one. When Dio refers to the Spartan practice of maintaining their hair on the eve of battle, and the fact that this adds to their fearsome reputation, Synesius counters that all 300 Spartans died.<sup>96</sup> He follows that with a series of examples in which hair and

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(Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994); the Latin word for comet, *comata*, literally means 'long-haired star'. This comet is also recorded in Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 66.17.2, trans. E. Cary and H. B. Foster, Loeb Classical Library 176 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).

<sup>93</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.10.6.

<sup>94</sup> Varro, *On Agriculture* 1.37.2, trans. W. D. Hooper and H. B. Ash, Loeb Classical Library 283 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934); Ausonius, *Eclogues* 26.5–6, trans. H. G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library 96 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919).

<sup>95</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.12.1–3; see Celsus, *On Medicine* 1.4.1, 3.18.8, 3.20.4, 3.23.7, 4.2.6, 4.2.9, 4.11.8, 6.2.2, 6.6.8 E, 6.6.15, 6.7.1 D, 6.7.4, 6.7.8 B, 7.7.15 D for recommendations of therapeutic head shaving.

<sup>96</sup> For the Spartan practice of maintaining their hair on the eve of battle, and the famed 300 doing so on the eve of the battle of Thermopylae, see Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 22.1; Herodotus,

military activity were a bad mix.<sup>97</sup> When Dio uses Achilles, who was, as we have seen, particularly famed for his hair in antiquity, Synesius counters that with the suggestion that, based on the description that Homer gives, Achilles was likely balding.<sup>98</sup> He concludes his treatise by proposing that it is the nefarious characters of ancient society who pay the most attention to their hair: the adulterous, the luxurious, the effeminate, the perverted, the self-mutilated.<sup>99</sup> This is a standard listing of individuals who were considered deplorable by the elite members of ancient Roman society, and certainly their hair was used as a means of identifying them.

### **Conclusion**

The Romans considered premature hair loss, whether experienced by men or by women, disfiguring. However, an individual suffering from premature hair loss was not only literally but also figuratively disfigured. Premature hair loss was a significant deviation from the natural order of things, and the way that both men and women were supposed to look prior to old age. In a society that utilized physical appearance as an indicator of any number of things, an individual's hair and the way that it was styled told someone looking at them everything they needed to know. Someone suffering from premature hair loss was, quite literally, not

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*Histories* 7.208–09. For Dio's reference, see Synesius, *Oration* 40.3.1; for Synesius' refutation, see *Oration* 40.15.1.

<sup>97</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.15.3–16.4.

<sup>98</sup> For Dio's reference, see Synesius, *Oration* 40.3.4; for Synesius' refutation, see *Oration* 40.17.2–5, 6; for Achilles' supposed baldness, see *Oration* 40.18.3–4. The state of Achilles' head is discussed in Morgan, 'Hair and Heroism', 210–13.

<sup>99</sup> Synesius, *Oration* 40.21.1–3.

conforming to Roman society's unofficial rules regarding how they were supposed to look for the purpose of fulfilling the social contract. Additionally, the belief in a direct connection between an individual's physical appearance and their character and morality meant that those whose physical appearance deviated from the desirable norm were thought to possess a character and morality that likewise deviated from the desirable norm.

Finally, let us return to Domitian. The Flavian dynasty had previously been associated with physiognomy in a positive way. Domitian's elder brother Titus, who had been educated alongside the emperor Claudius' son Britannicus, had had his face examined by a physiognomist hired to examine Britannicus', and the physiognomist declared that while Britannicus would never rule, Titus would.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, Vespasian himself gave considerable credence to divination through astrology and dream interpretation.<sup>101</sup> Was it feasible to endorse divination through physiognomy in the case of one Flavian emperor and reject it in the case of another? Domitian's hair loss was certainly, as far as the Romans were concerned, a facial disfigurement. However, it was also indicative of a much more severe moral disfigurement, so it is not surprising that it was this physical feature that the 'bald Nero' was remembered for.

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<sup>100</sup> Suetonius, *Titus* 2.1, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 38 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914).

<sup>101</sup> Suetonius, *Vespasian* 25.