



Ralf von den Hoff (Freiburg)

## Physical Defiance, Meaningful Bodies and Entertainment. The Roman Portrait of a Hunchback in the Baths of Caracalla

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Jahrestagung 2019 „Contrast and Complementary Figures for Portraiture and Biography“  
Vortrag Dienstag, 2. Juli, 11.30 Uhr

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### Abstract

The Roman marble statue of a male hunchback, found in the Baths of Caracalla in Rome and today preserved in the Villa Albani, has long been considered a representation of the Archaic Greek poet Aesop. But the style and typology of its head rather suggest that it is the portrait of a Roman man of the later 2nd century CE, possibly one of the physically deformed slaves owned by the imperial court. Neither such individuals nor such bodily defiance had been worthy of a portrait statue of such size before. The lecture argues that the presentation of physical defiance of such an individual in the Baths of Caracalla, 1) opened up to the broad audience visiting such thermae an entertaining experience, which otherwise had been appreciable – practically and visually – only to the social elite, and 2) contrasted explicitly the physical defiance of the rather small scale statue with numerous ideally designed bodies of male statues also of much larger size, which stood in the Baths of Caracalla as well. In this case, a complementary portrait representation provided to the entertainment of its viewers and to their social distinction, because it confirmed the viewers different body ideals and rather strictly constructed a polarity of beauty/elite versus ugliness/slave.

