



THE
GEORGIAN
GROUP

David Wilson, 'Michael Rysbrack's antique head on modern shoulders', *The Georgian Group Journal*, Vol. XXI, 2013, pp. 15–29

MICHAEL RYSBRACK'S ANTIQUE HEAD ON MODERN SHOULDERS

DAVID WILSON

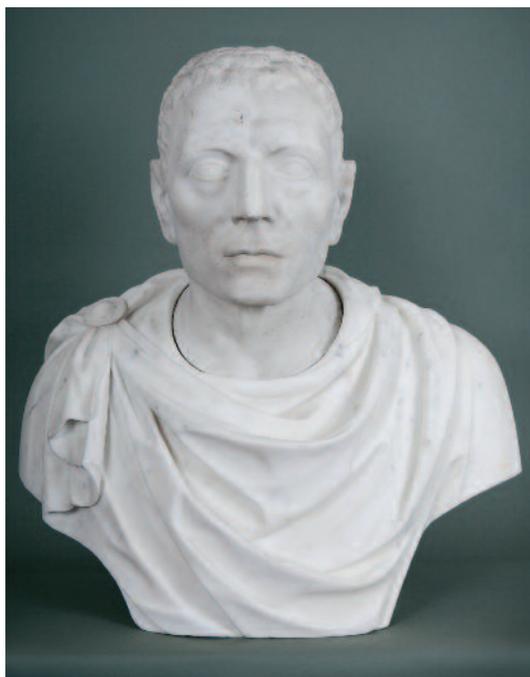


Fig. 1. Roman head, c. 1st Century AD, marble, on 18th-Century marble torso carved by Michael Rysbrack (1694–1770), h. 54 cm. (Photograph: Mark Simmons)

On 29 May 2012, the London auctioneer, Bonhams, sold a bust (Fig. 1) described as ‘After the Antique: A marble composition bust of Julius Caesar, wearing a toga pinned at the right shoulder, raised on an associated grey veined marble plinth’.¹ That description, frequently used in sale rooms, implies a bust made of resin and marble dust that replicates an original, usually marble, bust made earlier, frequently centuries earlier, in this case a bust

assumed to be of Julius Caesar probably made around 40BC to 100AD.² However, the surface of the bust was at that time covered in dirt, and its subsequent removal has revealed that the bust is not what it had seemed to the auctioneer. Rather, it is of special interest in the context of British eighteenth-century sculpted portraiture in marble, a genre that not only then became ubiquitous and at times surpassed the painted portrait, reaching its apogee during the reigns of George II to George IV, but which also helped place sculpture in Britain in the vanguard of European artistic output. The bust is also of significance to a discussion of the ‘restoration’ of antique sculptures and sculptural fragments, a practice in which some leading British sculptors or leading sculptors working in Britain in the eighteenth century were at times engaged.

THE APPEAL OF THE SCULPTED CLASSICAL PORTRAIT BUST IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

Central to eighteenth-century English portrait busts (though not generally for contemporary painted portraits³) is the classical format in which the majority of them were produced. The bust, truncated across the chest and just under the shoulders, and resting on a shaped base (socle) is a highly conventional format developed by the Romans from Greek sculptural portraits. Male sitters in the eighteenth century were frequently depicted with short hair (a departure from the wig worn in

public or the soft cap that replaced it when in private) and clothed in a classical style of drapery that was clearly distinguishable from contemporary dress. Having regard to its classical antecedents, Malcolm Baker has commented of the eighteenth-century portrait bust that, 'By making reference to and invoking the past (especially an antique past) through its forms and conventions, the bust as a genre carried for the viewer associations and expectations of repetition through tradition.'⁴

Certain social and political conventions greatly contributed to the ubiquity of the portrait bust in eighteenth-century Britain, when it became a common feature in the houses (and sometimes the gardens) of the aristocracy and others who possessed wealth but not nobility. The aristocracy and gentry then dominated the political and social elites. With a new political status enhanced by the Bill of Rights, the maintenance of power and privileges won at the expense of the Stuart monarchs in the seventeenth century – most recently following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 – was the dominant discourse. Its key themes were 'liberty' and 'virtue', a political vocabulary in common employment throughout the first half of the eighteenth century by those of different political persuasions, not just the Whig faction that supported the constitutional monarchy. Philip Ayres has argued that because the discourse 'was so avowedly moral and civic-minded it seemed *ipso facto* self-legitimising; and of course its terms were rich in classical overtones, lending it authority.'⁵

Thus the appreciation of antique sculpture by British society was deeply rooted in political conviction: 'the equation of the Antique with liberty and high moral standards was well entrenched in English society. . . . The origin lay in drawing parallels between English society following the Glorious Revolution and the Roman Republic and Rome under the 'good emperors',⁶ and found expression in a variety of ways, one of which was the manner in which those who sat to sculptors were depicted in their portraits.

Britain's national spirit of triumphalism following her victory in the War of the Spanish Succession was such that that the painter Jonathan Richardson could claim that 'No Nation under Heaven so nearly resembles the ancient Greeks, and Romans than We.'⁷ New architecture embodying classical references (seen in the Palladian revival promoted by Lord Burlington and others in the 1720s) was supplemented with 'monuments to men of genius, or cultural heroes'.⁸ In this environment, the portrait bust, which 'made this link between the present and the classical past most explicit',⁹ came into its own.

In the eighteenth century the periwigs associated with portraiture of the earlier Baroque age gave way in the case of most sitters¹⁰ to the type of short curled hair 'arranged in a highly artificial configuration' that owed its origins to the antique Roman portrait bust, but which 'corresponds to no hairstyle that a contemporary would have worn or seen.'¹¹ It was a mode of depicting hair that was to become fashionable and widely adopted from the early 1720s for over twenty years. Thus portrait busts that depicted leading members of the political and military elite in classicising dress, and that alluded to an antique Roman past, not only suggested their qualification for the privileges they enjoyed, but also connoted the sitter's fitness to hold public office through the bust's function in endowing him with the appropriate civic virtues.¹² This 'Roman self-imagining' as it has been described by Ayres,¹³ reflected a community of shared moral and political values by those depicted, rather than a direct emulation by them of classical exemplars.

In the same way, the busts of recently deceased or contemporary men of letters or science, modeled in classical style, were often displayed as role models in libraries, both in private houses and semi-public institutions (such as Trinity College, Cambridge and Trinity College, Dublin): 'Those considered appropriate to signify different forms of learning represented in the library itself – whether Homer or

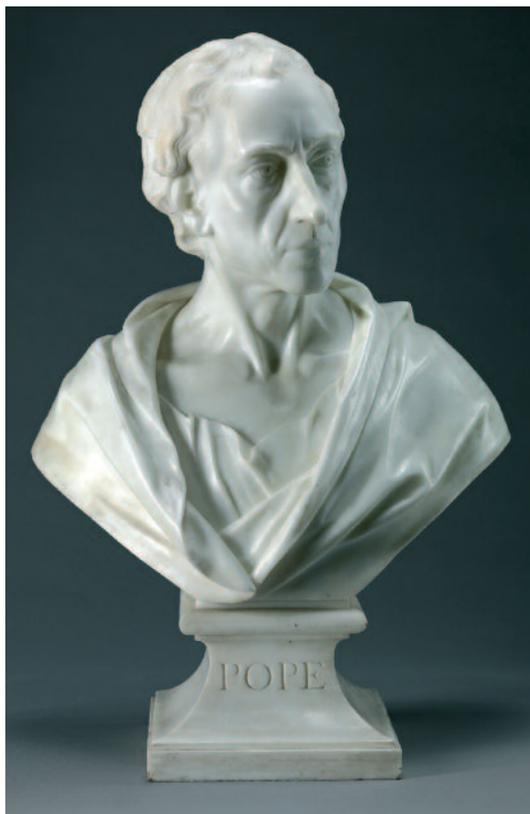


Fig. 2. *Alexander Pope* (1688–1744), by Louis François Roubiliac (1702–62), marble, 1741, 24 3/4 × 17 × 9 inches (62.9 × 43.2 × 22.9 cm). (*Yale Center for British Art, gift of Paul Mellon in memory of the British art historian Basil Taylor [1922–1975]*)

Seneca from the ancient world, or Milton or Newton from the more recent past – came to form a canon of worthies repeated from library to library.¹⁴ As Marcia Pointon has noted, ‘That which provided the root form of so many depictions of the human head, the Roman portrait bust, offered in concentrated form a notion of the whole man.’¹⁵ The bust of Alexander Pope (Fig. 2) by Louis François Roubiliac (1702–62), of which there are at least five autograph versions in marble by Roubiliac and of which many copies were produced in plaster in the eighteenth century, is one of the most notable examples of this phenomenon.

In his bust ‘the poet is represented, not dressed in a wig, but with short hair and wearing drapery that, while generalised, made unequivocal reference to the patterns employed on antique busts.’¹⁶ Ayres has observed that ‘Roman dress was ... appropriate for the poets who had established in English literature those standards they so admired in Roman Augustan poetry.’¹⁷ The celebrated bust of the philanthropist, antiquary, bibliophile, and defender of liberty, Thomas Hollis, c.1760 (marble, National Portrait Gallery), depicted in the guise of Brutus, slayer of the dictator Julius Caesar, was exhibited in the entrance to the Houghton Library at Harvard University during the 1990s. Its presence there achieved a function not dissimilar to that performed by portrait busts in the eighteenth-century library. The bust, by Joseph Wilton, RA (1722–1803), did not signify Hollis himself as the author of the books on the shelves in the Houghton Library, but identified him in authoritative fashion as the munificent benefactor whose generosity (in the mid-1760s) had secured them for the library, and whose own particular political and moral inclinations and artistic and scientific interests had designated the subject matter of the volumes.¹⁸

MICHAEL RYSBRACK AND HIS PROMOTION OF THE CLASSICAL STYLE

Born in Antwerp in 1694, the sculptor Michael Rysbrack (who went to London about 1720 and died there in 1770) can be credited with taking the first steps that led English sculpture out of the provincial backwater in which it had languished for many centuries, thus according it a very worthy place on the European artistic scene.¹⁹ Rysbrack (Fig. 3) was the leading sculptor in Britain from 1720–1740, during which period he was the greatest exponent of the classical style in portrait sculpture, and was one of the most important practitioners in Britain in the



Fig. 3. *John Michael Rysbrack* (1694–1770) modelling his terracotta statue of Hercules 1753, by Andrea Soldi (1703–71), oil on canvas, 45¼ in. × 35¾ in. (114.8 cm × 90.9 cm). (Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, USA)

two following decades or so, alongside such illustrious figures as Roubiliac and Wilton. It has been justifiably recorded that ‘when compared with the painted portraits of the time the sculptured portraits [by Rysbrack] will be found to rank very high’,²⁰ and Matthew Craske has remarked, ‘the monuments and busts of Rysbrack and his competitors can justly be regarded as the forebears of the grand portraits of the aristocracy that were the speciality of Reynolds and Gainsborough.’²¹

The extensive, if not entirely novel,²² employment of classical precedent in the eighteenth century, so far as concerns portrait sculpture, is reflected in the prodigious output of busts by

Rysbrack in the first twelve years following his arrival, many of them in classicising style; and ‘the main theme which runs through nearly all his work and makes it a coherent whole is ... the theme of heroes in Greek or Roman dress, classical draperies and more or less static poses.’²³

A bust that typifies Rysbrack’s classical style is that of Charles Spencer, third Earl of Sunderland, a leading political figure in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, who died in April 1722. That bust (Fig. 4), dated 1722,²⁴ still stands in the broken pediment over one of the fireplaces in the Long Library at Blenheim Palace, where it has probably been since around 1749. Shorn of the wig in which he was usually depicted in portraits by artists during his lifetime, Sunderland is portrayed in Roman drapery and with close-cropped hair, Rysbrack employing antique convention for his portrayal of the Earl, ‘indicative of the emphatic manliness of a Roman noble of the Augustan era.’²⁵

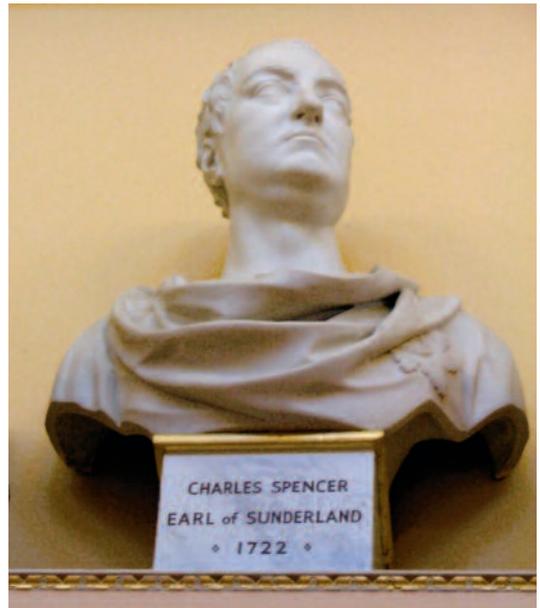


Fig. 4. *Charles Spencer, 3rd Earl of Sunderland*, c.1722, by Michael Rysbrack, marble. (Photo: Reproduced with kind permission of His Grace the Duke of Marlborough)

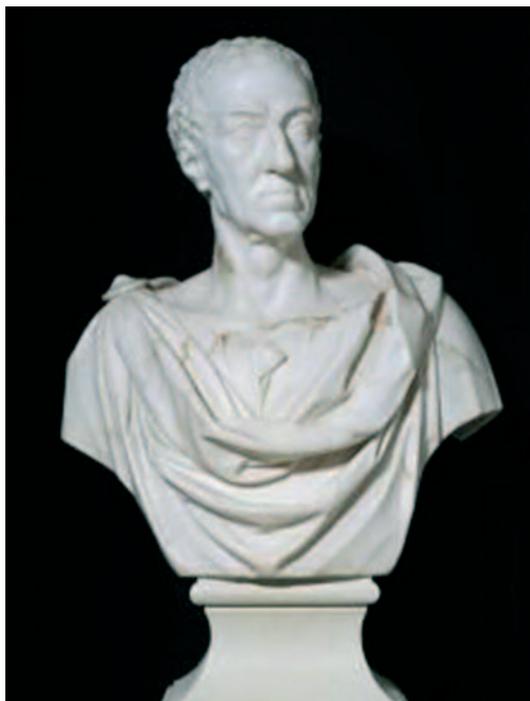


Fig. 5. *Daniel Finch, 2nd Earl of Nottingham, 7th Earl of Winchelsea (1647–1730)*, by Michael Rysbrack, c.1723, marble, h. 62cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, A.6-1999. Purchased with contributions from The Art Fund, the Parnassus Foundation, through the American Friends of the V&A, the Hugh Phillips Bequest, the Henry Moore Foundation, and Sotheby's, whose donation was made in memory of Terence Hodgkinson. (© V&A Images Limited)

Another early and justly celebrated work by Rysbrack is his bust of Daniel Finch, second Earl of Nottingham (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) (Fig. 5). The bust is not dated and, like most of Rysbrack's completed marble busts, is unsigned. It has been described by Margaret Whinney as 'perhaps the most important of [the] early works of Rysbrack; and... a landmark in English sculpture (and indeed probably unique in the Europe of its day)'.²⁶ The eighteenth-century chronicler of the arts, George Vertue, seems to have recorded it around 1723,²⁷ seven years before the Earl of

Nottingham's death in 1730 at the age of 83. Finch had decorated his country house with scenes from the life of Julius Caesar. Baker has commented that

'Finch's image plays on the congruence of the sitter's physiognomy with the antique portrait busts believed at this date to represent Julius Caesar ... The antique in this case suggested a public role and was thus deemed appropriate for a statesman who could be represented in a manner that articulated those civic humanist qualities required in the senate.'²⁸

Arguably the most successful depiction by Rysbrack of a contemporary figure in classicising mode is his marble bust portrait (Fig. 6) of George Hamilton, first Earl of Orkney (bap.1666–1737), whose justified



Fig. 6. *George Hamilton, 1st Earl of Orkney (1666–1737)*, by Michael Rysbrack (1694–1770), marble, c.1733, h. (including pedestal) 32 $\frac{7}{8}$ in; 83cm. Private Collection, on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum. (Photograph: The author)

claim to fame rests not on his status as a representative Scottish peer in the House of Lords, nor as a Gentleman of the Bedchamber to George I, but on his distinguished and at times heroic military service, most notably during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), when, as a General serving under the Duke of Marlborough at the Battle of Blenheim in August 1704, he led the final assault on the village of Blenheim, receiving the surrender of its French defenders. He took part in a number of Marlborough's succeeding campaigns, notably the battle of Malplaquet in 1709, where Orkney's battalions led the charge toward the French entrenchments, suffering serious losses. Marlborough was an adherent to the strategy of attack combining cavalry and infantry, and Orkney's leadership of the infantry was not only indispensable to Marlborough's success in the field, but on some occasions was the vital component of that success, such as at Malplaquet, where so fierce were the French counterattacks that 'I really believe, had not ye foot been here, that the enemy would have driven our Horse from the field.'²⁹ Orkney was, late in life, to be the first British military officer accorded the rank of field marshal.³⁰



Fig. 7. Reverse of bust illustrated in Fig. 5.
(*Photograph: the author*)

In his bust by Rysbrack, carved in 1733, currently exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Orkney is depicted as a Roman military commander,³¹ with close-cropped curly hair and furrowed brow, his breast plate (cuirass) partly covered with a heavy cloak attached with a clasp on his right shoulder.

THE GENESIS OF THE BUST IN FIG. 1

The bust depicted in Figure 1, rather than being a marble composition bust of Julius Caesar as catalogued by the auctioneer, in fact consists entirely



Fig. 8. Reverse of bust illustrated in Fig. 6.
(*Photograph: Wojciech Sobczynski*)



Fig. 9 (above). Reverse of bust illustrated in Fig. 1.

(Photograph: Mark Simmons)

Fig. 10 (right). Profile view of bust illustrated in Fig. 1.

(Photograph: Mark Simmons)



of marble³² and, albeit apparently unknown to the auctioneer, has its provenance seemingly in Michael Rysbrack's workshop and personal collection. This is demonstrated by a number of factors relating to the structure and format of the bust and the sitter's drapery.

The busts of Orkney and Nottingham, with their concave curves below the arms, which are not derived from antiquity, are symptomatic of Rysbrack's oeuvre,³³ and the Nottingham bust (Fig. 7) and the Orkney bust (Fig. 8) both have a distinctive and meticulously finished, open, curved back.³⁴ This feature is observed in most other busts by Rysbrack, but was not employed by other sculptors, even those resorting to the classicism associated with the work of Rysbrack. As can be seen from Fig. 1, the bust has the concave curves below the arms that are typical of Rysbrack's productions and the shape of the torso is identical with almost all of Rysbrack's busts, which follow a particular pattern distinctive to his workshop. Also, and significantly (albeit this was not illustrated in the sale catalogue), the bust has the distinctive and

meticulously finished, open, curved back (Fig. 9) that is an almost universal feature of busts by Rysbrack.

Furthermore, the bust incorporates the Baroque flourish in the deeply undercut, three dimensional folds of drapery that is so evident in the drapery carved by Rysbrack for his busts of Nottingham and Orkney. This feature of heavily undercut drapery in Rysbrack's work had earlier (in relation to the bust of the Earl of Nottingham) led Whinney to remark: 'Nor is the drapery treatment, with its deeply undercut folds standing away from the body, a close imitation of Antiquity, but is still Baroque in feeling',³⁵ alluding to the Baroque influence on Rysbrack of his own master, Michael van der Voort, an Antwerp sculptor working in the Baroque medium, whose oeuvre was also tinged with the classical idiom. In fact, the phenomenon of heavily undercut drapery in Rysbrack's portraits, which departs from antique convention, is to be seen in very many busts and other works by him (beyond those already identified) that depict the sitter in the antique manner. They include the busts of Sir

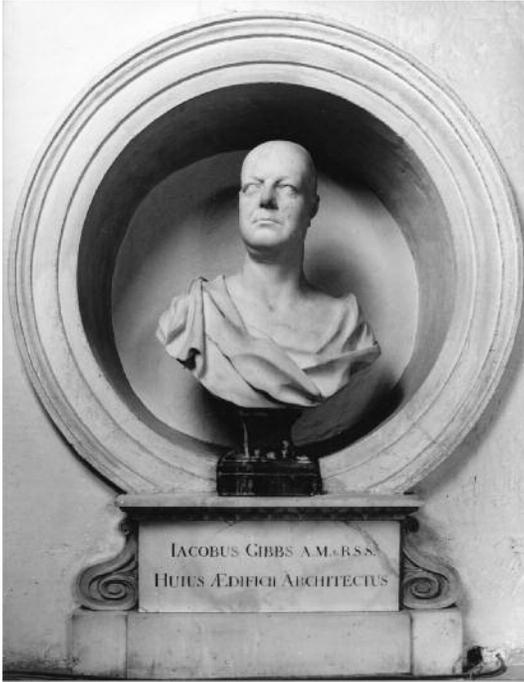


Fig. 11 – *James Gibbs* (1682–1754) by Michael Rysbrack, signed and dated 1726, marble, Radcliffe Camera, Oxford. (Photograph: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, London)

Robert Walpole, first Earl of Orford (1726–30, terracotta, National Portrait Gallery, London; marble, Houghton Hall, Norfolk); Alexander Pope (1730, National Portrait Gallery, London);³⁶ the first Duke of Marlborough; the busts on the monuments respectively to Admiral Boscawen (1763, marble, St. Michael, Penkevil, Cornwall) and Admiral Sir John Jennings (1743, marble, St. Mary Magdalene, Barkway, Hertfordshire), and the statue of John Locke, described by Mrs Webb as ‘a masterpiece. Classic in its repose, the great folds of the drapery give it a touch of the baroque.’³⁷

In the same way, the drapery on the bust in Fig. 1, stands proud of the torso (Fig. 10), not only reflecting the Baroque flourish so typical of Rysbrack’s busts, but also differing considerably from the flattened and rather rigid forms of busts made in the Roman

Republican and Imperial periods. The direct frontal pose of the head would, without the Baroque flourish of the drapery, give the bust an entirely static appearance.

The loop of cloth on the sitter’s right shoulder is again a distinctive trope in busts by Rysbrack, and can be seen, for example, in the drapery on his bust of James Gibbs at the Radcliffe Camera, Oxford (1726) (Fig. 11), and in his bust of the eighth Earl of Winchelsea, 1744 (Private Collection), repeated almost identically on Rysbrack’s terracotta bust of the second Duke of Beaufort, Badminton House (1754), where the directional flow of the loop has been reversed but in all other respects follows the pattern of the loop on the bust in Fig. 1, and also incorporates the clasp on the drapery in the same position on the shoulder.

The head on the bust is intriguing. It is not like any head carved by Rysbrack. A discussion of the heads of his busts of the Earls of Nottingham and Orkney is instructive in this regard. In 1964 Whinney drew attention to the treatment of the features of the Nottingham bust, which she viewed as a departure from the typical antique portrait. Whinney correctly stated that if Rysbrack’s bust of Nottingham is compared to any antique bust

‘it is quickly apparent that instead of the generalised, reticent, and often flattened surfaces, his forms are full and rounded and within the area of the cheek a play of curve against curve is stressed. In it there is therefore a combination of the lofty idealism and the veneration of Antiquity ... with a richness of pattern and a fullness of form derived from the sculptor’s Baroque background.’³⁸

It can also be seen in the bust of Orkney, where the features are strongly carved, with the eyes deeply recessed under a very furrowed brow, and the Earl’s large, prominent nose (also recorded in his painted portraits by Martin Maingaud, c.1736 and by Sir Godfrey Kneller, c.1704)³⁹ sharply off-setting his face, itself thinning with advancing age, an effect emphasized by the heavily scored facial lines running



Fig. 12. Detail of bust illustrated in Fig. 6.
(*Photograph: Wojciech Sobczynski*)

in a vertical but semi-circular pattern from below the eye sockets to the line of the mouth. All the features – the eyes, the nose and the lips – are rendered with all the asymmetry that is typical in the human face, and this is also observed in the large number of historicising busts by Rysbrack of long dead figures from Britain's or England's 'glorious' pasts, for example, John Milton as an elderly man (1740, Stourhead) and King Alfred (1764, Stourhead).⁴⁰

The bust of Orkney, observed in profile (Fig. 12), perhaps best demonstrates how Rysbrack did not slavishly follow antique precedent, but invested each of his portraits with the physical characteristics

personal to the sitter. This reflected Vertue's comment on Rysbrack, that 'His superior merit to other Sculptors is very apparent in his Modells of portraits – from the life none equalling for truth of Likeness and property of ornaments or head-dress, &c'.⁴¹ Rysbrack has overcome the limitations of the marble to create an image of Lord Orkney that is as vital as, and in many respects more lively than, his painted portraits by Maingaud and Kneller. To paraphrase a remark of David Bindman and Malcolm Baker on Rysbrack's near contemporary, Roubiliac, in this depiction of Lord Orkney by Rysbrack, 'the [bust] astonishes because of the sculptor's Pygmalion-like power to transform the inanimate into living form'.⁴²

The head on the bust in Fig. 1 was not carved by Rysbrack. It has little of the naturalistic, individual or asymmetrical features of the carving of the human face that are an ever-present trait of Rysbrack's work. That can be demonstrated, for example, merely by reference to the ears (Fig. 13), which are an exact



Fig. 13. Detail of bust illustrated in Fig. 1.
(*Photograph: Mark Simmons*)

replica of each other, are mechanistic and pedestrian in their design and appear to be an impression of an ear, rather than the ear of an actual human being, contemporary or historical. Moreover, there is a particularly telling feature that distinguishes this head from any male head by Rysbrack in the classical style: such male busts by Rysbrack have close-cropped hair and curls of nearly identical patterns, as is evident from the busts of the Earls of Nottingham and Orkney, the latter carved around ten years after the former. The hair of the bust in Fig. 1 is – as was once said of an eighteenth-century bust in classicising style by one of Rysbrack's less effective competitors – 'disposed in tidy, close, parallel waves; whereas Rysbrack, even in the Nottingham [and Orkney], breaks up the pattern with looser locks curling in different directions.'⁴³

The head is in fact an antique head, probably dating from around the first to second century AD, and of a different type of marble from that of the drapery into which it has been inset, which drapery itself was made in the eighteenth century by Rysbrack. The head, which once formed part of an antique bust or possibly came from a full-length, life-size statue, almost certainly is not a representation of Julius Caesar – though it undoubtedly represents some 'worthy' of classical Roman civilization – and was not believed even by Rysbrack to represent the dictator; as noted earlier, Rysbrack's head of Nottingham, although personalized to reflect Nottingham's own physical characteristics, 'plays on the congruence of the sitter's physiognomy with the antique portrait busts believed at this date to represent Julius Caesar'. The head in Figure 1 is not unique and evidence suggests that it is an antique replica of another antique bust. In that regard, a fine marble head, but set upon a full naked torso, in an American collection in the 1970s and more recently on the American art market, and bearing remarkably close similarities to the head in Fig. 1, but with considerably greater refinement in the carving of the ears, has been stated to be possibly from the classical

Roman period. Its closest parallel, in the Uffizi, Florence, had been identified as being a portrait of Cicero, although it is now known that the type is not Cicero.⁴⁴ Indeed, like the bust in the Uffizi, the one from the American collection is affixed to a nineteenth-century base inscribed 'MTC' for Marcus Tullius Cicero. As with the bust in the Uffizi, the identity of the sitter of the head from the American collection and the bust in Fig. 1 is unknown, but the sitter must have been of some importance to have had such an impressive portrait of himself carved and particularly to have had more than one commissioned, even if the quality of carving differs as between the replicas. As will be seen later, Rysbrack, who modelled and carved his own bust of Cicero, does not appear to have considered the head to be that of Cicero.

No attempt has been made by Rysbrack to improve or enhance the face in fig. 1, and, as will be demonstrated later, no attempt was made by Rysbrack to dissimulate and pass-off the bust as an entirely antique production. For all these reasons the bust cannot be said to be 'after' an antique bust of Julius Caesar, as Bonhams recently surmised.

While most of Rysbrack's oeuvre has been located, some of his busts are presently missing. In her monograph on Rysbrack in 1954, Marjorie Webb listed the busts by him that had been recorded by George Vertue and in other sources, and noted those whose location was then unknown. In addition to contemporary sitters, Rysbrack produced busts of a large number of historicising figures, mainly British or English. He also sculpted busts of classical philosophers, orators, poets and heroes, including Seneca, Cicero (as noted earlier), Virgil and Antinous, and mythological gods and demi-gods, including Apollo and Hercules, most of which busts remain un-located. Curiously, neither Mrs Webb, nor *A Biographical Dictionary of Sculptors in Britain 1660–1851*, published in 2009, lists the bust in Fig. 1 amongst Rysbrack's oeuvre.⁴⁵

Some of the most well-known sculptors of the

eighteenth century, including some British sculptors, had at times in their careers been involved in the restoration of antiquities, by adding missing limbs or in-fills to missing sections. Joseph Wilton is known to have undertaken such work from time to time. For example, the diary of his friend, sitter and patron, Thomas Hollis, records several 'repairs' carried out by the sculptor to antique sculptures owned by Hollis.⁴⁶ In some cases, however, the 'repair' was so skillfully undertaken by a sculptor that the 'completed' piece was thereafter able to be offered by its owner to an unsuspecting third party at a huge price, the sculpture being passed-off as an intact antiquity. One of the most valuable antiquities ever to enter Britain was the 'Newby' – or 'Jenkins' – Venus. The painter Thomas Jenkins (1722–1798) had visited Italy on the Grand Tour but remained there and acted as a banker to the travelling English and as a dealer and an intermediary for the purchase and importation into Britain of antique statuary from Italy in order to satisfy the insatiable appetite of the English aristocracy and wealthy gentry for such items. A number of pieces sent over by Jenkins had been subjected or were to be subjected to substantial restoration. Perhaps Jenkins's most famous transaction related to a statue of the same type as the *Venus de' Medici* (Uffizi, Florence), which he bought from Gavin Hamilton (1723–1798, who had himself acquired the statue in 1763 from the Barberini collection where it was first recorded in 1738) and then sold for an undisclosed, but reportedly enormous, sum in 1765 to William Weddell of Newby Hall, Yorkshire. Jenkins apparently passed off the statue (a late first or early second century Roman Parian marble copy of an original Hellenistic statue probably from the second century BC), as original and intact, despite its previous extensive restoration – including the addition of a head – at the hands of the Pope's chief restorer, the sculptor, restorer and antiquarian, Bartolommeo Cavaceppi, or possibly Pietro Pacili (or both).⁴⁷ Joseph Nollekens, RA (1737–1823), who was to become the

leading British portrait bust sculptor in the last few decades of the eighteenth century and the first decade or so of the nineteenth, entered Cavaceppi's studio before 1764, 'where he learnt many dubious restoration techniques of which he was to boast in later life.'⁴⁸

Despite the fact that Rysbrack had never been to Italy and studied its classical statues and busts, Katharine Eustace has demonstrated that he was fully acquainted with antique sculpture. Although his training in the classical tradition was second-hand from his master, since he had never himself visited Rome, he had made it his business to understand and appreciate antique prototypes, and amassed a large collection of antique sculptures and marbles, bronzes and plaster casts after the antique, as well as a significant reference library of all the great seventeenth- and eighteenth-century engravings of antique sculpture, as well as Montfaucon's *L'antiquité expliquée* of 1719.⁴⁹ It is certain that a number of the motifs employed in Rysbrack's Roman-style portraits, and which are also found in the bust of Orkney, were drawn from this last publication. It seems that amongst his large collection of antique marbles was the head that forms part of the bust in Fig. 1, which bust appears, amongst Rysbrack's oeuvre, to provide a unique example of the in-setting of an antique head into eighteenth-century drapery. Despite the absence of the bust from lists of Rysbrack's oeuvre published by previous commentators, the bust is presumably that which appeared in the sale of Rysbrack's own collection by Mr Langford and Son on 20 April 1765, held at their house in the Great Piazza, Covent Garden, London.⁵⁰

By the early years of the 1760s Rysbrack was in seriously diminishing health, such that he increasingly became unable to work, and before the end of November 1765 had ceased work altogether,⁵¹ giving rise to financial hardship. It was no doubt this that caused him to arrange a sale earlier that year, in April, of items from his own collection, mainly works

of his own invention, including many portrait busts and tables and a chimneypiece.⁵² The description of the bust in the April 1765 sale catalogue not only demonstrates Rysbrack's lack of any belief in the head as being that of Julius Caesar, or Cicero, but also his scrupulous honesty in not attempting to pass off the whole as an antique production.⁵³ Clearly he had decided to mount an antique head he owned in 'classical' drapery, but drapery that was his own 'modern' invention, no matter how much it might have been inspired by his knowledge of the antique. Under the heading 'Busts in Marble' on page 3 of the sale catalogue, lot 35 was 'Ditto of an Antique Head, with modern Drapery'.

CONCLUSION

It is not known where the bust in Fig. 1 has been since 1765. The re-discovery of this bust, a combination of what is probably a first or second century AD Roman head from the collection of Michael Rysbrack, and a torso for the head definitely carved by Rysbrack sometime between 1720 and the early 1760s, marks an important moment in the discussion of Rysbrack's oeuvre. In this single object, with its distinctively modelled torso and classical drapery, Rysbrack's own special, eighteenth-century, brand of the antique, as distinct from the antique itself, is clear for all to observe.

NOTES

- 1 Bonhams, *Period Design*, London, Knightsbridge, 29 May 2012, lot 296. The bust is 54 cm high.
- 2 In this article, the expression 'antique' is used to describe work of the ancient Roman or Greek eras.
- 3 A well-known exception is Sir Joshua Reynolds's portrait of Commodore Keppel, 1752–3, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, where the artist endowed Keppel with classical dignity by imitating the pose of the famous classical statue, the *Apollo Belvedere*. See R. Simon, *The Portrait in Britain*

and America, Oxford, 1987, pp. 76–84, where many such examples are illustrated and discussed. Classical subjects were, of course, a major genre in painting and sculpture for centuries, and appreciation of classical antiquity was a fundamental influence on the visual arts.

- 4 M. Baker, 'Pope, the Portrait Bust and Patterns of Repetition', in L. Cymer (ed.), *Ritual, Routine, and Regime* (Toronto, 2006, hereafter Baker, Pope), pp. 224–45, at p. 226.
- 5 P. Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1997, hereafter Ayres), p. 1. For a detailed study of political argument in early eighteenth-century England, when the politics of virtue were both vigorously pursued and challenged, and when there emerged a privately oriented conception of civic virtue, see Shelley Burt, *Virtue Transformed: Political Argument in England, 1688–1740* (Cambridge, 1992), esp. Chap. 2.
- 6 See J. Coutu, "'A very grand and seignuerial design": The Duke of Richmond's Academy in Whitehall', *The British Art Journal*, 1 (2) (2000), pp. 47–54, at p. 50.
- 7 J. Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (London, 1715), p. 209.
- 8 H. W. Janson, *Nineteenth-Century Sculpture* (London, 1985), p. 17, citing the Temple of Worthies at Stowe, containing portrait busts by Michael Rysbrack and Peter Scheemakers of eminent figures from English history, and Louis François Roubiliac's marble statue of Handel for Vauxhall Gardens, 1738.
- 9 M. Baker in Robert Rosenblum and others, *Citizens and Kings: Portraits in The Age of Revolution, 1760–1830* (Paris and London, 2006–2007), p. 212.
- 10 Exceptions being Rysbrack's busts of the first Earl of Macclesfield, c.1722 (Private Collection); James Gibbs, 1726 (Radcliffe Camera, Oxford); the eighth Earl of Winchelsea, c.1744 (Collection: Dr Gustav Rau); and Joseph Wilton RA's bust of Dr Cocchi, c.1756 (Victoria and Albert Museum), who are all depicted bald.
- 11 M. Baker, "'No cap or wig but a thin hair upon it": Hair and the Making of the Male Portrait Bust in England around 1750', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38 (1) (Fall 2004), pp. 63–77 at p. 72.
- 12 Ayres, p. 64. See Matthew Craske, *The Silent Rhetoric of the Body: A History of Monumental Sculpture and Commemorative Art in England, 1720–1770* (New Haven and London, 2007,

- hereafter Craske), in relation to eighteenth-century funerary monuments in England. The Reade monument at Hatfield (1760) demonstrates Rysbrack's learning on the ancient Roman world and his ability to evoke its practices, by a design that recalls the Roman custom of carrying the busts of one's patrician ancestors to a funeral: Craske, pp. 220–2; Ayres, p. 73.
- 13 Ayres, p. 64.
- 14 P. Curtis et al., *Return to Life: A New Look at the Portrait Bust* (London, 2000), p. 8.
- 15 Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 1993), p. 7.
- 16 Baker, Pope, p. 226.
- 17 Ayres, p. 72. See also Baker, Pope, p. 230.
- 18 See D. Wilson, 'A bust of Thomas Hollis by Joseph Wilton RA: Sitter and artist revisited', *The British Art Journal*, 5 (3) (Winter 2004), pp. 4–26, at p. 20, pl. 35. See also the discussion of the first Earl of Macclesfield's decision to have his own *all'antica* bust by Rysbrack, c.1722, displayed in the library at Shirburn Castle in the early 1720s among the plaster casts of famous antique heads that had very recently been acquired by his son on the Grand Tour: D. Wilson, 'A very early portrait by Michael Rysbrack: the Earl of Macclesfield', *The Georgian Group Journal*, 17 (2009), pp. 19–40 (hereafter Wilson, Macclesfield), at pp. 32–3.
- 19 That process of advancement, initiated by Rysbrack, was further encouraged by the sculpture of his fellow Fleming Peter Scheemakers, who arrived in England around 1721 or possibly a few years before: M. Whinney, *Sculpture in Britain 1530–1830* (Harmondsworth, 1964, hereafter Whinney), p. 79; M. I. Webb, *Michael Rysbrack Sculptor* (London, 1954, hereafter Webb), p. 64. It accelerated at the end of the 1730s and during the following decade after the arrival in London in 1730 of the Frenchman Louis François Roubiliac, later progressing further with the productions of the British-born sculptors Henry Cheere, Joseph Wilton and Joseph Nollekens.
- 20 Webb, pp. 62–3. See also J. Kenworthy-Browne, 'Portrait busts by Rysbrack', *National Trust Studies*, 1980.
- 21 Craske, p. 37.
- 22 E.g. the two monuments to Francis Holles (d.1622) and George Holles (d.1626) both by Nicholas Stone in Westminster Abbey and the bronze figure of James II in Trafalgar Square from the workshop of Grinling Gibbons: see Webb, p. 47. There seems little doubt that Rysbrack was also greatly influenced by the classical portrait of the fifth Earl of Exeter in repose on his tomb at St. Martin's, Stamford, Lincolnshire, designed and carved (1703) in Rome by Pierre-Étienne Monnot, and possibly the marble portrait busts at Burghley House, nearby, of the fifth Earl (1701) and his wife by Monnot, and Exeter's brother, Lord William Cecil, by Francesco Maratti 'which in their classical quality were far in advance of their time. There is nothing like them in Europe until Rysbrack's... 'Earl of Nottingham' in 1723 which set the fashion for many others': Katharine Eustace, *Michael Rysbrack Sculptor 1694–1770* (exh cat., City of Bristol Museums and Art Galleries, 1982, hereafter Eustace), pp. 115–6, cat. no. 38.
- 23 Webb, p. 46.
- 24 Although the bust is inscribed 1722, that most probably signifies the date of the Earl's death rather than either the date of its carving or the date when it was commissioned: see Wilson, Macclesfield, at pp. 21–22 and notes 13 and 14.
- 25 Craske, p. 139.
- 26 Whinney, p. 85.
- 27 'The Notebooks of George Vertue, Vol. III', *Walpole Society*, XXII (Oxford, 1934, hereafter Vertue III), p. 17. On the dating of the bust, see J. D. Stewart, 'New Light on Michael Rysbrack: Augustan England's "Classical Baroque" Sculptor', *Burlington Magazine*, 120 (April 1978), pp. 215–22, at p. 216 and n. 7. On the bust see D. Bilbey with M. Trusted, *British Sculpture 1470–2000. A Concise Catalogue of the Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London 2002, hereafter Bilbey and Trusted), pp. 127–8.
- 28 M. Baker, 'A Genre of Copies and Copying? The Eighteenth-Century Portrait Bust and Eighteenth-Century Responses to Antique Sculpture', in T. Barsch, M. Becker, H. Bredekamp and C. Shreiter (eds.), *Das Original der Kopie. Kopien als Produkte und Medien der Transformation von Antike* (Berlin, 2010), pp. 289–311, at p. 296.
- 29 Lord Orkney, quoted in D. Chandler, *Marlborough as a Military Commander* (2nd ed., London, 1979, hereafter Chandler), p. 91. Chandler (p. 149; see also pp. 329–30) has stressed the fact that the Allied success in the War of the Spanish Succession was not due to one man only, and that Marlborough was

- exceptionally well served by several subordinate generals, of whom Orkney is amongst the most prominent.
- 30 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), XXIV, pp. 802–4. T. A. Heathcote, *The British field marshals 1763–1997: a biographical dictionary* (London, 1999), pp. 165–6.
- 31 The bust of Orkney is discussed at length in D. Wilson, 'The British Augustan oligarchy in portraiture: Michael Rysbrack and his bust of the Earl of Orkney', *The British Art Journal*, 11(2) (2010/11), pp. 43–61 (hereafter Wilson, Orkney). The Duke of Marlborough was similarly portrayed by Rysbrack in military costume. For the decision of another general serving under Marlborough, the second Duke of Argyll, to be portrayed by Rysbrack around 1733 in a classicising toga that normally depicted a statesman, rather than in a military cuirass, see M. Baker, *Figured in Marble: the making and viewing of eighteenth century sculpture* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2000, p. 139.
- 32 The present owners of the bust have kindly allowed me to examine it closely and I have discussed its construction with a leading sculpture conservator who also has examined the bust.
- 33 Whinney, p. 86, commented that the form of the Nottingham bust, which is also seen in the Orkney bust, 'with its long concave curves below the arms, is not derived from Antiquity, and may be an echo of the long form still being used for busts in Rysbrack's youth by his master'.
- 34 In 'The making of the portrait busts in the mid-eighteenth century: Roubiliac, Scheemakers and Trinity College, Dublin', *Burlington Magazine*, 137 (Dec 1995), pp. 821–31, at p. 827, Malcolm Baker discussed different workshop practices of the primary sculptors in England during the eighteenth century, noting that '...Rysbrack frequently employs either the smoothly worked, deep curve seen on his Pope in the National Portrait Gallery, London or a back with a central, cylindrical support, such as that found on his bust of Francis Smith.'
- 35 Whinney, p. 86.
- 36 Busts illustrated in Webb, pp. 149, 40 and 72; E. Angelicoussis, 'Walpole's Roman Legion: Antique Sculpture at Houghton Hall', *Apollo*, 169 (February, 2009 pp. 24–31), at pp. 24–5.
- 37 Illustrated in Webb, pp. 72, 188; and see Webb, p. 169, on Locke. To adapt the language of Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven and London, 1980: sixth printing, 2004), p. 25, while the forms of the components of Rysbrack's busts 'are powerfully and artfully controlled', they are not a complete synthesis of 'the representational pre-occupations and neo-classical basis of the Renaissance. It is difficult to know quite what . . . the people who bought his work were about, but it was certainly not [direct] assimilation to the Italian.'
- 38 Whinney, p. 86.
- 39 For these portraits, see Wilson, Orkney, at pp. 45 and 47, pls. 2 and 5.
- 40 For these busts, see Eustace, pp. 167–8 and 172–3, cat. nos. 76 and 79.
- 41 Vertue III, p. 84.
- 42 D. Bindman and M. Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth Century Monument: Sculpture as Theatre* (New Haven and London, 1995, hereafter Bindman and Baker), p. 71. The exceptional quality of the bust of Orkney may owe something to a special bond between sculptor and sitter, as discussed in Wilson, Orkney, p. 50.
- 43 Whinney, p. 95; Dr Whinney was referring to Peter Sheemakers's bust of Viscount Cobham, c.1740, Victoria and Albert Museum.
- 44 http://curatorseye.com/item_detail_printable.php?Item=1245 (the bust in the American collection). See, e.g., Anton Heckler, *Die Bildniskunst der Griechen und Römer* (Stuttgart, 1912), Pl. 146a (for the version in the Uffizi, Inv. No. 393).
- 45 Webb, pp. 210–28; Ingrid Roscoe, Emma Hardy and M. G. Sullivan (eds.), *A Biographical Dictionary of Sculptors in Britain 1660–1851* (New Haven and London, 2009, hereafter Dictionary), pp. 1079–91.
- 46 7, 11, 14, 17 and 21 July 1761; and 7, 10 and 12 July 1764. Hollis's autograph diary is in the collection of the Houghton Library, Harvard University (MS Eng 1191).
- 47 For the subsequent history of the 'Newby' *Venus*, see D. Wilson, 'Roubiliac, the earl of Pembroke, and the chancellor's discretion: preservation of the nation's heritage by the consistory courts of the Church of England', *Journal of the Church Monuments Society*, 21 (April 2007), pp. 141–184, at pp. 143–4. In his diary (see note 46 above) for 26 July 1765, Thomas Hollis records seeing at the sculptor Joseph Wilton's workshop a plaster cast 'from the Venus lately purchased by Mr Weddel of

- Mr Jenkins.' Clearly Wilton had appreciated that the marble had been repaired and supplemented, because Hollis's diary entry continues, 'Though a fine figure upon the whole, yet it has been considerably restored'.
- 48 Dictionary, p. 897. See also Ilaria Bignamini and Clare Hornsby, *Digging and Dealing in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (New Haven and London, 2010), 2 vols, I, pp. 252, 305–7.
- 49 Bernard de Montfaucon, *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures* (Paris, 1719–1724). The catalogues of the auction sales of Rysbrack's collection and library (both before and after his retirement) provide the source for the text about his collections of casts and engravings. The contents of those catalogues are summarised in Eustace, pp. 11–12.
- 50 Although the bust was sold at Bonhams in 2012 with an associated grey-veined marble plinth of modern, twentieth-century, design, it is clear from examining the underside of the torso, where there is no evidence of any dowel or other intended fixing, that the bust was never intended by Rysbrack to be affixed to a socle. A number of Rysbrack's extant busts (including the Earl of Nottingham) do not have their original socles – or indeed may not have had socles.
- 51 Dictionary, p. 1078.
- 52 There was an earlier sale in 1764 of 'the capital and entire collection of prints, drawings, and books' of Rysbrack; and a further sale of his 'models' was held by Mr Langford and Son on 25 and 26 July 1766. A final sale was held on 6–8 April 1772 of Rysbrack's remaining collection of drawings. None of these sales refers to any antiquity to which 'modern' additions have been made.
- 53 When sold at auction in May 2012, a grey wash covered the torso, presumably to blend the whiter marble of the torso to that of the head, giving the bust a unified appearance. This was probably applied sometime after the bust left Rysbrack's ownership.