

# Lucretius' Appearance - Research into What He Looked Like

**Post by "Cassius" of May 13, 2021 at 10:22 AM**

For the time being I'll start this thread with this. I know we can find information about the Lucretius ring in the introduction to one of Munro's editions to his Lucretius. And I clipped that photo of the ring somewhere, so that exists on the internet too, but I don't know where the original is located. The sketches in the second picture are, on the left, from the sketchbook of Herculaneum discoveries (need link) and the one on the right is from the Munro book.

know this is the only reliably-sourced possible image of Lucretius. All the others are just artist speculations



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**Cassius Amicus** Author Admin +2

If someone were trying to sketch an artist recreation of Lucretius, I would suggest considering also the sketch that was made (apparently from this coin/ring) that was used on Munro's edition of Lucretius, and I would also consider this sketch of a figure found in Herculaneum in that old sketchbook from which we have sketches of many of the busts. This figure on the left would presumably be too young, but there is some resemblance. I don't know what the original from which that sketch on the left was made looks like.



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**Post by “Cassius” of May 13, 2021 at 2:10 PM**



**Post by “Cassius” of May 23, 2021 at 5:02 PM**

I hate it when I can't find something. I just posted a copy of the above into a facebook thread, and I'd like to be able to post a link to where the photo of the original can be seen. If anyone comes across that please add it to this thread. I know I have seen an entry in a book or a r  
he image on the left)



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**Post by “Eikadistes” of January 24, 2023 at 2:32 PM**

Outside of the Villa Borghese in Rome. I saw this the only time I went there in 2010.



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**Post by “Cassius” of January 24, 2023 at 2:47 PM**

Wow that does sort of match the ring! Do we know anything about the background of that statue?

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**Post by “Cassius” of January 24, 2023 at 2:50 PM**

I can't believe that Munro would not have made note of that statue - and Munro was the original source of my info on that ring, as he put it on his copy of his translation.

Is it possible that statue is newer than the late 1800s, and that the statue was inspired by the ring?

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**Post by “Cassius” of January 24, 2023 at 3:02 PM**

If we are able to determine that that bust is ancient we will really want to start highlighting it.

If we determine it is modern we will still likely want to use it as a good reconstruction based on the ring.

Either way this is well worth investigating and documenting.

And trying to get more angles and better pictures.

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**Post by “Joshua” of January 24, 2023 at 3:05 PM**

The bust is evidently not ancient. The inscription has the Italian (rather than Latin) spelling of his name. I can't find much about it, though.

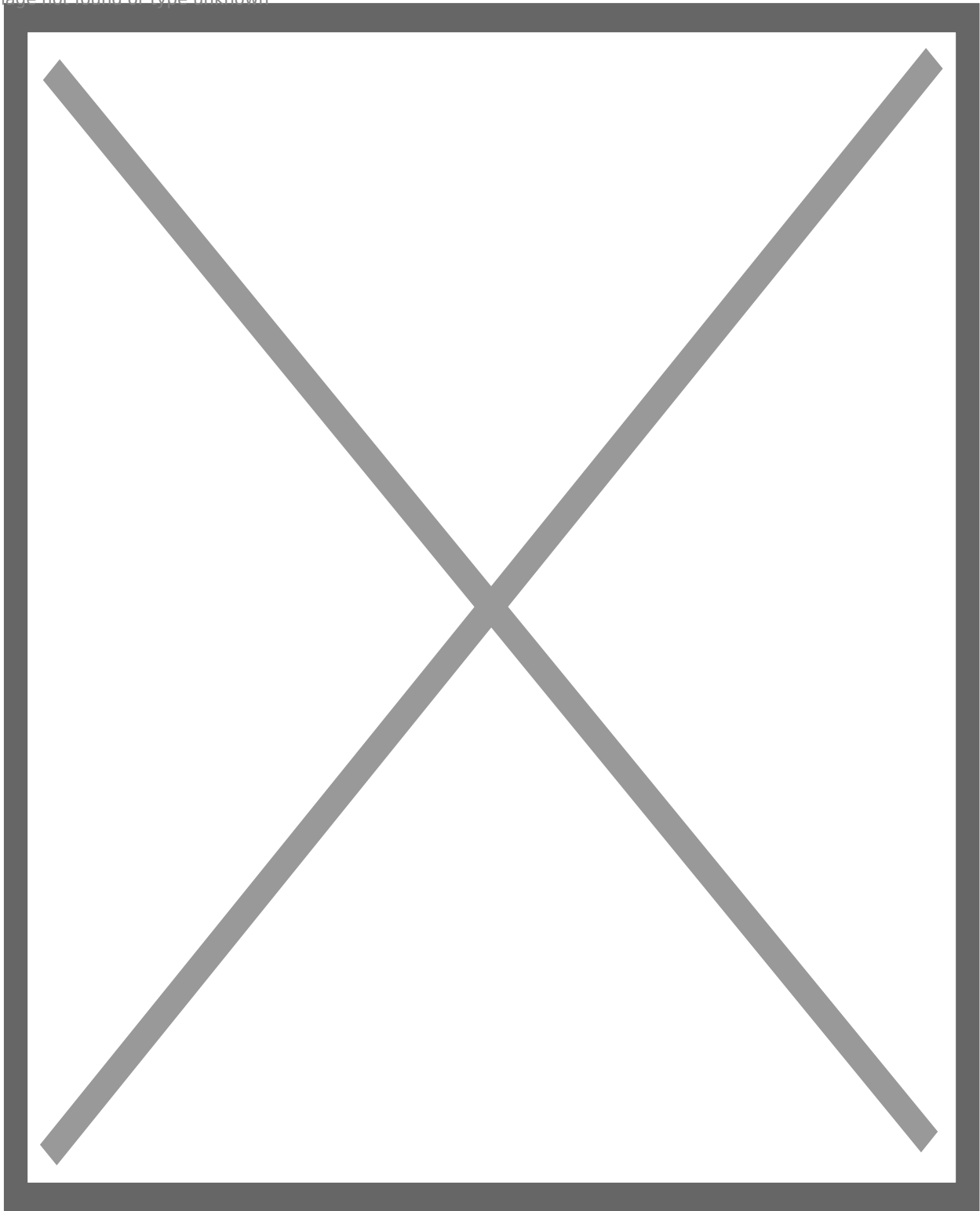
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**Post by “Joshua” of January 24, 2023 at 3:09 PM**

I'm coming up with a date range of 1859-1861 for the statue.

Edit to add;

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[Pincian Hill - Wikipedia](#)

[en.m.wikipedia.org](https://en.m.wikipedia.org)

Quote

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1995-lucretius-appearance-research-into-what-he-looked-like/>

In the gardens of the Pincian, it was Giuseppe Mazzini's (1805-1872) urging that lined the viali with busts of notable Italians.

Though the Villa Ludovisi was built over at the turn of the 20th century, several villas and their gardens still occupy the hill, including the Villa Borghese gardens, linked to the Pincio by a pedestrian bridge that crosses the via del Muro Torto in the narrow cleft below; the Muro Torto is the winding stretch of the Aurelian Wall, pierced by the Porta Pinciana.

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### **Post by “Joshua” of January 24, 2023 at 3:30 PM**

[Curious And Unusual - The Busts in the Pincian Gardens](#)

This webpage suggests that there were 52 such busts. An interesting read!

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 24, 2023 at 4:10 PM**

Great finds, Joshua! Also we need some eye comparisons:

Does it look to people here like the bust in the gardens was modeled after, or with reference to, or with intent to extrapolate from, the ring?

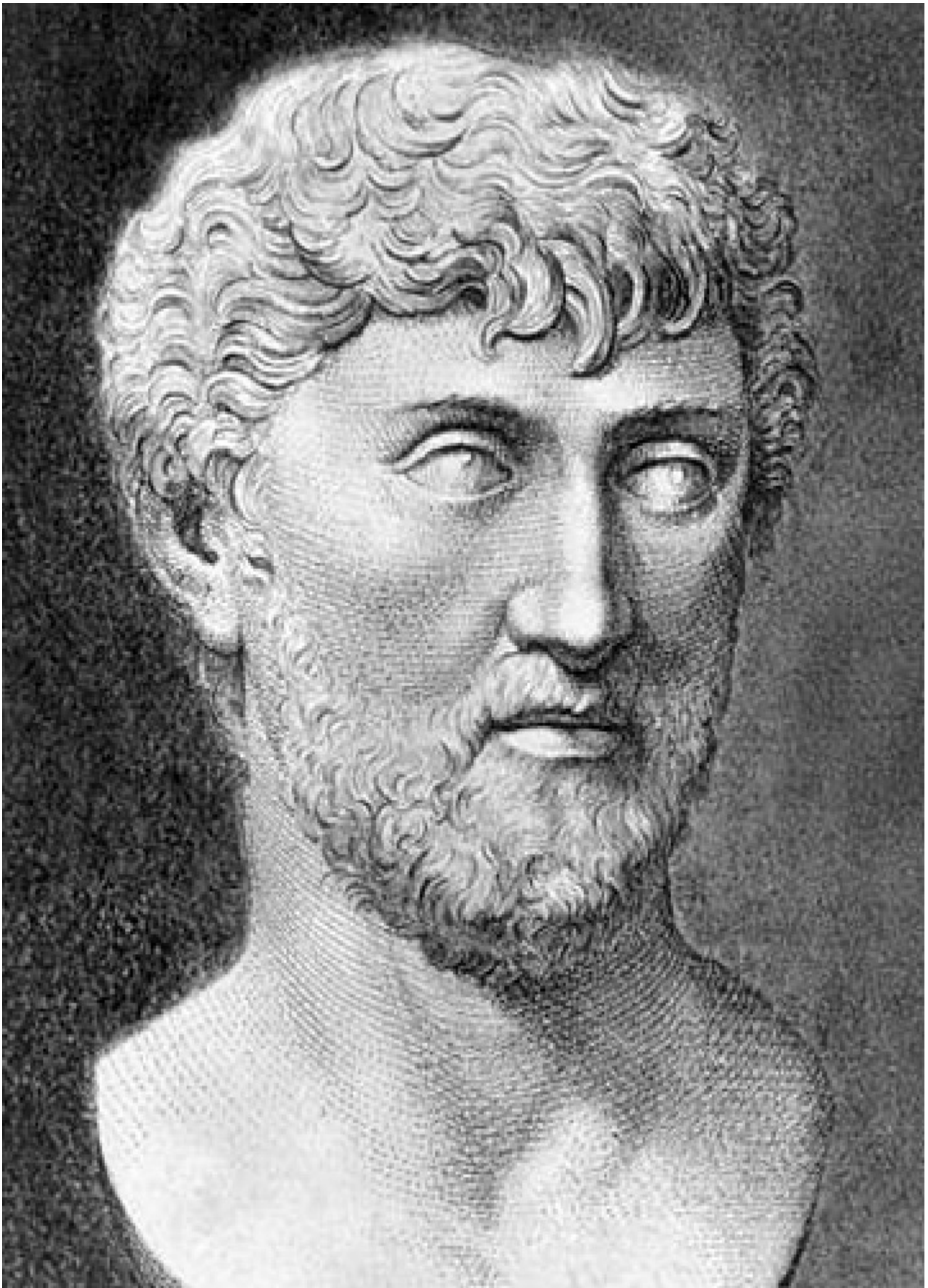
Or is there no intended or accidental resemblance at all?

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of January 24, 2023 at 5:33 PM**

Hard to say if the bust relates to the ring without some side views. The eyes are rather pronounced in each of them, though.

Here's another image. It's on this site <https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/contributors/lucretius> but I don't see any attribution.



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**Post by “Godfrey” of January 24, 2023 at 5:50 PM**

Looks like they probably got it from Wikipedia... <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucretius>

It also shows up here <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/de-la-nature...r-ce/1134766966>

Here it says that this image is an engraving from a bust <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lucretius> That might be the bust above, but if so it's not a good match to my eye.

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**Post by “Joshua” of January 24, 2023 at 5:52 PM**

Here's another cameo in plaster that is supposed to be Lucretius.



c. 1820, Pietro Paoletti

As for Munro's ring, I have now traced its history for a period of more than 50 years. I will present my findings tomorrow evening 😊

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**Post by “Godfrey” of January 24, 2023 at 5:56 PM**

There are also lots of images of Epicurus that turn up in a Google search of Lucretius 🤔

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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 24, 2023 at 6:11 PM**

Joshua I have not seen that Cameo before. Possible, but do you know anything about it? Maybe in your research tomorrow,

Godfrey the etched version you find is indeed the one I have found to be "standard" over the years. To me, that one doesn't look much at all like the ring, so I suspect it is unrelated, but again no idea where it came from

Thanks to all. I'd like to get some better pictures of that bust Nate found cause that looks to me like a reasonable likeness of the ring.

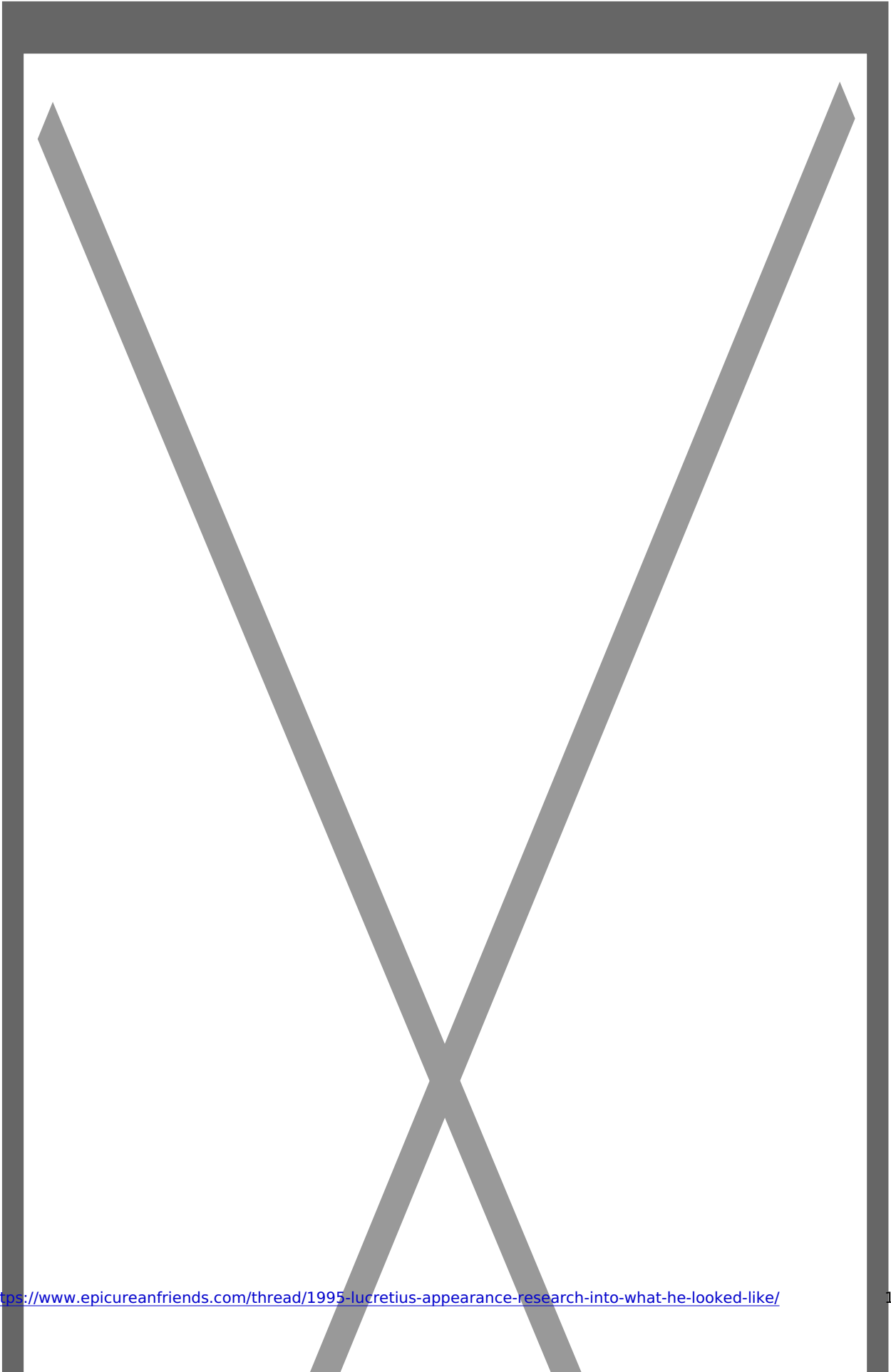
But I will suspend judgment waiting on Joshua!

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### **Post by “Joshua” of January 24, 2023 at 7:33 PM**

The one I showed above was an Italian souvenir made for travelers on a Grand Tour.

Image not found or type unknown



[Grand Tour - Wikipedia](#)

en.m.wikipedia.org

The Munro ring was thought by three experts in the 19th century to be a genuine ring from the late Roman republic. I don't know anything about the busts.

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### **Post by “Eikadistes” of January 24, 2023 at 9:44 PM**

One other angle from the Villa Borghese:



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### **Post by “Don” of January 25, 2023 at 7:30 AM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

An article I clipped somewhere -- not in English, but good pictures and possibly can be read through translators:

[https://www.academia.edu/12743915/Immag...afia\\_lucreziana](https://www.academia.edu/12743915/Immag...afia_lucreziana)



Fig. 1. Profilo di uomo barbato inciso su agata nera con l'iscrizione LVCR. I sec. a.C.

uomo barbato inciso su una gemma di agata nera con l'iscrizione LVCR (fig. 1) che nei primi anni '30 del diciannovesimo secolo il filologo tedesco Karl Otfried Müller identificò senza esitazioni con Lucrezio.<sup>19</sup> Nella seconda metà del secolo l'autenticità dell'attribuzione veniva confermata da un'expertise realizzata a cura dell'Istituto Archeologico di Roma e dall'esperto di gemme antiche Charles William King.<sup>20</sup> L'autorità di King indusse Hugh A. J. Munro a pubblicare nel 1866 un'incisione della gemma sul frontespizio della sua celebre edizione del *De rerum natura*.<sup>21</sup> Nel 1882 l'autenticità della gemma veniva messa

a.C., Cicerone aveva informato Attico (*Att.* 5,11,6) di aver scritto a Memmio, il dedicatario del *De rerum natura* e proprietario dei terreni ad Atene ove sorgevano i ruderi della casa di Epicuro, per dissuaderlo dal progetto di demolirla.

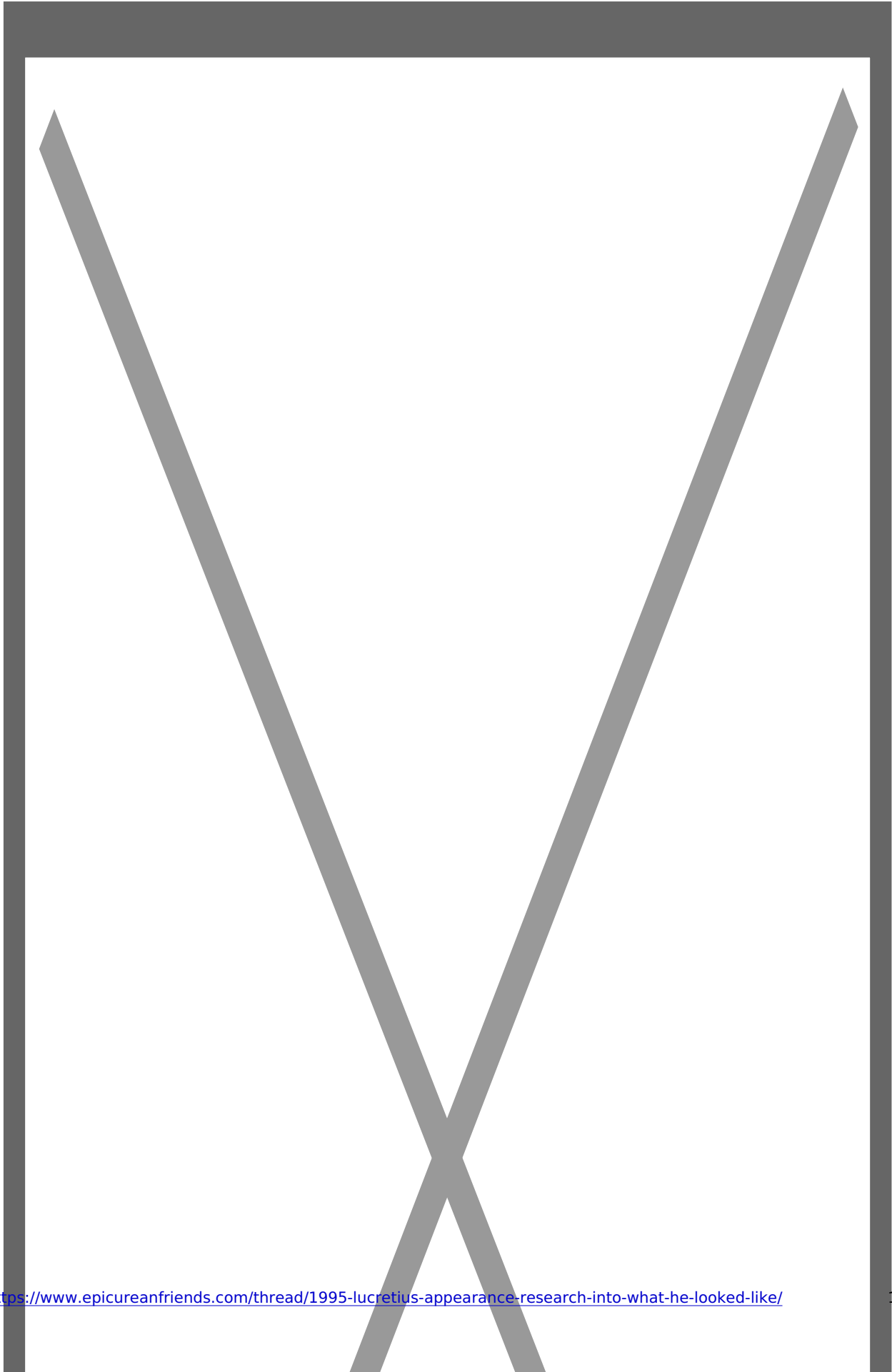
<sup>19</sup> «The head of Lucretius is given on a gem», KARL OTFRIED MÜLLER, *Ancient Art and its Remains; or A Manual of the Archaeology of Art*, (London: Fullarton, 1847<sup>2</sup>), p. 497.

<sup>20</sup> «To this perplexing uncertainty, there is one fortunate and remarkable exception in the *Lucretius*, on black agate (formerly Dr. Nott's), in scribed LVCR in the lettering of his own time; accepted by the infallibility of the Roman Archaeological Institute, and K. O. Müller, as the unquestionable *vera* effigies of the poet-philosopher». CHARLES WILLIAM KING, «The portraiture of the Ancient», *The Archaeological Journal*, 1870, 27: 16-35, p. 29. Vedi anche *Id.*, *The Handbook of Engraved Gems* (London: Bell, 1866), p. 376.

<sup>21</sup> «To the advice and friendly assistance of my brother fellow Mr King, our highest authority in that branch of art, is due the likeness of the poet which appears on the titlepage. With K. O.

I was slightly surprised that they date that engraved gem to the 1st century BCE. I hadn't realized that was contemporary to him. My only question would be: do we \*know\* it's Lucretius the poet and not another 1st c. BCE member of the gens Lucretia:

Image not found or type unknown



[Lucretia gens - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

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### Post by “Cassius” of January 25, 2023 at 8:19 AM

#### [Quote from Don](#)

My only question would be: do we \*know\* it's Lucretius the poet and not another 1st c. BCE member of the gens Lucretia:

I love the way you phrased that question. It calls for both a history debate, or even more so, a canonic discussion on the proper definition to be given to the word "know!"

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### Post by “Joshua” of January 25, 2023 at 8:38 AM

There was another Lucretius who was a "moneyer", a private individual permitted to mint coins. His name was Gneius Lucretius Trio, and its all over his coins. But in his case it was "CN LVCR".

I think I'll post my slides now, but I can still go through them later. The critical source was one I stumbled on by complete accident or really good googling, I'll let others be the judge 😊

You can download the file from Swisstransfer here:

Edit to add: Cassius has informed of errors, see the new link in post #28 below.

This link will expire in 30 days.

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### Post by “Cassius” of January 25, 2023 at 8:39 AM

Also, re-reading that footnote, how are you people interpreting the "inscribed LVCR in the lettering of his own time"?

"His" meaning Lucretius, or "his" meaning Dr. Nott?

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**Post by “Cassius” of January 25, 2023 at 8:41 AM**

Oh this slide show is EXCELLENT Joshua! We are most certainly going to have to set that up as both a "file" and an "article" that can be found from the front page. Is that going to be OK? Maybe you give a little talk about it at our Wednesday Zoom and then polish it off after that for publication?

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**Post by “Joshua” of January 25, 2023 at 8:42 AM**

"His time" meaning Lucretius' from everything I've read.

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**Post by “Don” of January 25, 2023 at 8:42 AM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Also, re-reading that footnote, how are you people interpreting the "inscribed LVCR in the lettering of his own time"?

"His" meaning Lucretius, or "his" meaning Dr. Nott?

Lucretius's, I'd say.

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**Post by “Joshua” of January 25, 2023 at 8:44 AM**

Yes, I've already started preliminary work on the article. I would hesitate to put the slide show on any kind of permanent display since it's lacking all of the relevant citations.

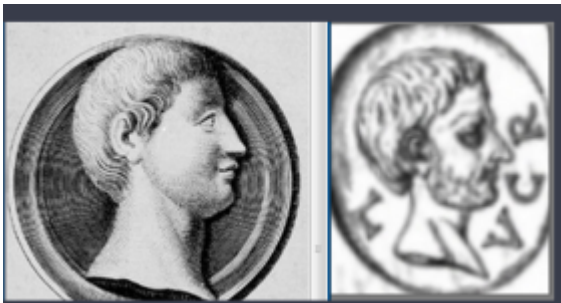
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**Post by “Cassius” of January 25, 2023 at 8:50 AM**

This comment on page 18 hits home with me:

"Mr. Munro calls the stone "a black agate," and does not mention its provenance. The engraving in his book does no justice to the portrait. There is another gem representing Lucretius in the Vatican: of old it belonged to Leo X. The two gems are in all respects similar. A seal with this head, or one very like it, belonged to Evelyn, the friend of Mr. Pepys."

There is another version of a cameo that resembles this but which is in much more detail and more attractive and I have long wondered if they were meant to be the same person. Maybe it's the one Joshua mentioned. Maybe it's this one from Herculaneum:



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### **Post by "Joshua" of January 25, 2023 at 8:51 AM**

Cassius has helped me correct a few errors, so here is the new link: I'll delete the old one.

<https://www.swisstransfer.com/d/b12fae33-82cb-4265-895e-ae5a4517dcab>

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### **Post by "Cassius" of January 25, 2023 at 8:56 AM**

Note too: That cameo sketch in my post 27 above - which I compare to the ring - comes from the same book of sketches of findings in Herculaneum from which we get the sketch of Epicurus' bust which I use throughout Epicureanfriends. I don't recall what page it is but the description of the location of its finding is no doubt in that book (in Italian). It seems that the sketcher created unique portrayals of what he was working from, and of course this isn't a photograph, so there's no telling what the original setting looked like and whether that circle background is the original.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1995-lucretius-appearance-research-into-what-he-looked-like/>

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## Post by “Joshua” of January 25, 2023 at 10:38 AM

More random stuff on the Munro ring--which I should probably start calling the Nott ring.

A book published in 2020 called *Engraved Gems and Propaganda in the Roman Republic and under Augustus* includes this under an index of ancient gems, reports it as 'whereabouts unknown', but sites a previous German work for details.

The German work is *Die antiken Gemmen* in two volumes by Adolf Furtwängler, published in 1900.



the gem:

And the second volume has this brief description:

4. Konvexer schwarzer Sard, ehemals Samml.  
NOTT. Erw. Bull. d. Inst. 1831, 112, 78.  
Kopf mit kurzem Vollbart. Beischrift LVCR

Which I gather means something like:

Quote

4. **Convex black Sard**, formerly of the Nott collection. [*Erw. Bull. d. Inst. 1831, 112, 78*]

Head with short beard. Marginal note LVCR

Sard, like agate, is a form of Chalcedony. I have no idea what "Erw. Bull. etc" means--it looks like a reference to an earlier work? A museum bulletin or catalogue?

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### **Post by “Joshua” of January 25, 2023 at 10:39 AM**

Quote

There is another version of a cameo that resembles this but which is in much more detail and more attractive and I have long wondered if they were meant to be the same person. Maybe it's the one Joshua mentioned. Maybe it's this one from Herculaneum:

That is certainly a remarkably close match!

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### **Post by “Todd” of January 25, 2023 at 11:32 AM**

[Quote from Joshua](#)

I have no idea what "Erw. Bull. etc" means--it looks like a reference to an earlier work? A museum bulletin or catalogue?

Probably won't be too helpful, but I can add that "Erw." is probably an abbreviation of "Erwähnt", "Mentioned".

So, "Mentioned in Bulletin of Institute..."

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### **Post by “Don” of January 25, 2023 at 5:58 PM**

Found it!!!



than continuing to live the ordinary, familiar life that men and women had lived for centuries, making themselves more or less comfortable in the midst of the crumbling, mute remains of antiquity.

Those remains were everywhere visible in Italy and throughout Europe:

bridges and roads still in use after more than a millennium, the broken walls and arches of ruined baths and markets, temple columns incorporated into churches, old inscribed stones used as building materials in new constructions, fractured statues and broken vases. But the great civilization that left these traces had been destroyed. The remnants could serve as walls to incorporate into new houses, as reminders that all things pass and are forgotten, as mute testimony to the triumph of Christianity over paganism, as literal quarries to be mined for precious stones and metals. Generations of men and women, in Italy and elsewhere in Europe, had developed effective techniques for the recycling of classical fragments, in their writing as well as their building. The techniques bypassed any anxiety about meddling with the leftovers of a pagan culture: as broken shards whether of stone or of language, these leftovers were at once useful and unthreatening.

What more would anyone want with the rubble over which the living had clambered for more than a thousand years?

Display More

Quote

Niccoli was one of the first Europeans to collect antiquities as works of art, prized possessions with which he surrounded himself in his Florentine apartments. Such collecting is by now such a familiar practice among the very rich that it is easy to lose sight of the fact that it was once a novel idea. Pilgrims to Rome in the Middle Ages had long been accustomed to gawking at the

Colosseum and other “marvels” of paganism on their way to worshipping at the places that actually mattered, the revered Christian shrines of saints and martyrs. Niccoli’s collection in Florence represented a very different impulse: not the accumulation of trophies but the loving appreciation of aesthetic objects. As word got round that an eccentric man was willing to pay handsomely for ancient heads and torsos, farmers who might in the past have burned any marble fragments that they ploughed up for the lime they could extract from them or used the old carved stones for the foundations of a pigsty began instead to offer them for sale. On display in Niccoli’s elegant rooms, along with antique Roman goblets, pieces of ancient glassware, medals, cameos, and other treasures, the sculptures inspired in others the impulse to collect.

Display More

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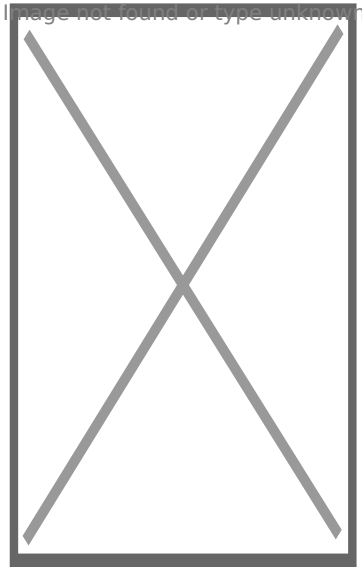
## Post by “Don” of January 25, 2023 at 10:25 PM

### [Quote from Joshua](#)

Don, you're a wizard! Thank you very much for looking for that, I'll add it to my source collection.

I was happy to do it... even though it drove me mad trying to dig it up 😊 I did this at work today so the above is a photo from my phone of my work computer screen!

Here is the link to Internet Archive:



[Bullettino dell'Istituto di corrispondenza archeologica = Bulletin de l'Institut de correspondance archéologique : Instituto di corrispondenza archeologica : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

The years 1854-55 were not published separately, but were included in the first two of the three volumes in-folio entitled: Monumenti, annali e bullettini...

archive.org

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### **Post by “Joshua” of January 26, 2023 at 12:10 AM**

[Onenski](#) made a very good point in our conversation this evening, when he mentioned that urbane Romans of the republic period did not customarily wear beards. [This](#) page from Lacus Curtius is an excellent summary of the situation; it outlines several conditions under which Roman men would cease shaving, a trend that started with Scipio Africanus who Pliny records as the first Roman to shave daily.

Roman men might not shave if:

- They are in mourning. Like wearing black, an unshaved beard in the Roman republic might mean that someone has died or something tragic has happened.
- They are of the lower classes. Not every Roman man could afford the time or money spent on a daily shave.
- They lived outside of the Capital city of Rome. These trends are seldom universal, and people who lived away from the main city might shave less often, or whenever they traveled to the city.

- They are boys who have not yet legally come of age. The ritual 'first shave' was part of the ceremony for assuming the *Toga virilis*.
- They are young men at the very end of the late republic period, and wear their beards short and well-trimmed. Cicero describes a certain class of Catiline conspirators this way;

#### Quote

There is a last class, last not only in number but in the sort of men and in their way of life; the especial body-guard of Catiline, of his levying; yes, the friends of his embraces and of his bosom; whom you see with carefully combed hair, glossy, beardless, or with well-trimmed beards; with tunics with sleeves, or reaching to the ankles; clothed with veils, not with robes; all the industry of whose life, all the labour of whose watchfulness, is expended in suppers lasting till daybreak. [23]

In these bands are all the gamblers, all the adulterers, all the unclean and shameless citizens. These boys, so witty and delicate, have learnt not only to love and to be loved, not only to sing and to dance, but also to brandish daggers and to administer poisons; and unless they are driven out, unless they die, even should Catiline die, I warn you that the school of Catiline would exist in the republic. But what do those wretches want? Are they going to take their wives with them to the camp? how can they do without them, especially in these nights? and how will they endure the Apennines, and these frosts, and this snow? unless they think that they will bear the winter more easily because they have been in the habit of dancing naked at their feasts. O war much to be dreaded, when Catiline is going to have his bodyguard of prostitutes!

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#### Post by “Remus” of June 23, 2024 at 1:36 PM

I've noticed that the bust of Lucretius in the Villa Borghese is the only one that doesn't have Lucretius sporting a Roman aquiline nose. What does that mean? Perhaps nothing.