

BUST OF A JULIO-CLAUDIAN PRINCESS

ROMAN, JULIO-CLAUDIAN PERIOD, 1ST CENTURY AD

MARBLE

NOSE, PART OF THE CHIGNON AND PEDESTAL FROM THE 18TH CENTURY.

HEIGHT: 73 CM.

WIDTH: 45 CM.

DEPTH: 26 CM.

PROVENANCE :

*FORMER EUROPEAN PRIVATE
COLLECTION SINCE THE LATE 18TH
CENTURY, BASED ON THE
RESTORATION TECHNIQUES.
FORMERLY IN THE COLLECTION OF A
DOCTOR, TOURCOING, NORTHERN
FRANCE, ACQUIRED IN 1970-1980.
PASSED DOWN WITHIN THE
SAME FAMILY.*



This large bust represents a middle-aged woman. Her oval-shaped face is emphasised by large, deeply carved, almond-shaped eyes, surmounted by delicately arched eyebrows, which create a subtle contrast with her eyes. Her fine features draw attention to her long nose, restored later, and fine, close-lipped mouth. The few wrinkles lining her face add a touch of originality to the bust, indicating that this Roman woman is middle-aged. Her face,



with its almost severe expression, is framed by a hairstyle as delicate as it is intricate. Her ears are left visible while her wavy hair, pulled back, is separated on top of her head by a central parting. Two plaits finally meet at the nape of her neck, forming a double link for the chignon, which is made up of four plaits. A few dainty curls have escaped from it.



This head is set onto an 18th-century bust dressed in a drapery with long folds, recalling the *stola*, a long, feminine dress worn by Roman women. The pedestal, also from the 18th century, identifies the model as Agrippina. While the portrait is similar to busts of the empress, it also resembles the portraits of other princesses from the Julio-Claudian dynasty such as Antonia the Younger and Agrippina the Elder. Antonia the Younger (36 BC - 37 AD) was the youngest daughter

of Mark Antony and Octavia, the favourite niece of Augustus and the mother of Claudius. The statues and busts in her image have hairstyles similar to that of our bust, particularly with the detail of the four-plait chignon (Ill. 1), and an oval face with carved almond-shaped eyes and austere features, as in the portrait conserved at Villa Poppaea in Torre Annunziata, Italy (Ill. 2).

Agrippina the Elder (14 BC - 33 AD) was granddaughter to Emperor Augustus, wife to Germanicus and mother to Caligula. Her portraits show a middle-aged woman, also with a hairstyle similar to that of our portrait (Ill. 3), and a face that is just as severe, as can be seen in the portrait conserved at the Louvre in Paris (Ill. 4).



Agrippina the Younger (15-59 AD), daughter of Agrippina the Elder, was sister

to Caligula, wife to Claudius and mother to Nero. Her portraits are inspired by those of her mother, with the same, sometimes severe, shape of face, particularly for the head conserved at the Louvre (Ill. 5). On a bronze sestertius struck during the reign of her brother Caligula and conserved at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Agrippina's hairstyle is practically identical to that of our portrait, with curls escaping her chignon (Ill. 6).



Thus, using these portraits, we can accurately date ours to the Julio-Claudian dynasty. It could represent one of these princesses, but it could also be the portrait of a woman of high society, whose features were sculpted to emulate those of women in the imperial family to show her lofty status. It was common for the aristocratic elite to imitate physical traits and hairstyles, and their portraits, arrayed within their

dwelling, served to assert their social position and show their wealth. This was the case of the Dame of Avenches (Ill.7). The portrait, dated to the reign of Tiberius during the Julio-Claudian dynasty, represents a young Roman woman whose hairstyle probably copied that of a princess or empress. It's the same case for a portrait conserved in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, where an unknown woman used some physical traits of a woman from the Julio-Claudian dynasty.



Comparatives:



Ill. 1: Portrait of Antonia the Younger, first half of the 1st century AD, marble, H.: 54 cm. National Archaeological Museum, Venice, Italy, inv. no. 243.

Ill. 2: Head of Antonia the Younger, 1st century AD, marble, H.: 32.5 cm. Villa Poppaea, Torre Annunziata, Italy, inv. no. 71442.



Ill. 3: Bust of Agrippina the Elder, 1st century AD, marble, H.: 41 cm. National Archaeological Museum, Venice, Italy, inv. no. 183.



Ill. 4: Head of Agrippina the Elder, second quarter of the 1st century AD, marble, H.: 36 cm. Musée du Louvre, France, inv. no. MA 1271.



Ill. 5: Head of Agrippina the Younger, third quarter of the 1st century AD, marble, H.: 26 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. MA 1232.



Ill. 6: Sestertius, ca. 37-41 AD, bronze, D.: 39 mm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, United States, inv. no. 35.221.



Ill. 7: Head of a woman, 1st century AD, reign of Tiberius, marble, H.: 42.4 cm. Laténium (archaeological museum), Neuchâtel, Switzerland, inv. no. 489.



Ill. 8. Head of a woman, 1st century AD, Julio-Claudian, marble, H.: 25 cm. Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, inv. No. St. 3195.

