

PORTRAIT OF MARCUS AURELIUS

ROMAN, CIRCA AD 140-160
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 30 CM.

WIDTH: 25 CM.

DEPTH: 30 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*FORMER EUROPEAN COLLECTION SINCE
THE 17TH-18TH CENTURY, BASED ON THE
RESTORATION TECHNIQUES.
FORMER FRENCH PRIVATE COLLECTION
OF GUSTAVE CLÉMENT-SIMON
(1833-1909), AT HIS RESIDENCE AT
CHÂTEAU DE BACH, NAVES, CORRÈZE.
PASSED ON TO GEORGES COUTURON
UPON THE SALE OF THE CASTLE AND HIS
ENTIRE COLLECTION IN 1938.
PASSED DOWN WITHIN THE SAME
FAMILY THEREAFTER.*



This imposing marble head is a portrait of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (AD 121-180). His smooth, round face has a rather small but broad forehead, demarcated by sharply arched eyebrows characteristic of this type of

portrait. His protruding eyes are big and round, with thick eyelids that have pronounced contours. His irises are clearly etched and his pupils hollowed out in a crescent shape, lending his gaze a great depth. We may assume that this portrait was intended as a three-quarter profile.



His nose, long and quite large, is straight and strong, rounded at the tip. His nostrils are deeply carved, and the sides of his nose very lifelike in their representation. His mouth is small with thick lips that are very slightly parted, as though to convey the appearance of life. His chin, which is also small, is covered by a wavy beard, the sparseness of which points to his youth. The beard starts at his temples, forming a relatively voluminous strip on each side that ends at his chin. It is



finished with a very thin moustache that joins each side of his mouth before merging with his beard. His hair, composed of big, curly locks, forms a thick, abundant mass that spills out on each side of his head. Each curl was individually sculpted and twists in a different direction. The sculptor's work is so exquisite that even each separate strand of hair seems to have been individually carved. A play of shadow and light arises from the different volumes, created through the use of a drill, which enabled the sculptor to carve the stone deeply. The large mass of hair and the way it was carved, in particularly sharp relief, give the impression it is blowing in the wind. His ears, partly covered by his hair, are rather large and very detailed, in a clear desire to imitate life.



Marcus Aurelius had a particularly well-established iconography. He is known to have almost 110 portraits, categorised into four distinct iconographic types. He was the nephew of the emperor Hadrian, adopted by Antoninus Pius on 25 February 138, at nearly 17 years of age. Many portraits of the young Marcus Aurelius were created and disseminated on that very day. Two successive iconographic types quickly

emerged, including our portrait, belonging to the second type we know of, the "adolescent type", dated to 140-160/161. It was in that period that he came to power, before becoming emperor in 161 upon the death of Antoninus Pius. Marcus Aurelius was then forty and a new iconographic portrait type came into being, representing him as an older man through infographic devices such as a full beard and moustache, a slightly different hairstyle and thinner features.



Here, the striking contrast between the very smooth face of the teenage emperor and his unruly beard and hair is particularly noteworthy. The pupils carved in crescent shapes are characteristic of the new type of portrait that appeared in around AD 140. His gaze is thus accentuated, evoking the figure of the philosopher-emperor, an iconographic type characteristic of the years of Marcus Aurelius' reign. Marcus Aurelius, who was, himself, a Stoic philosopher, wrote his *Meditations: Thoughts to Myself* at the end of his life, in Greek. These were, in fact, his thoughts on following the path of philosophy and a rigorist doctrine based on morals and virtue. Portraits of the "adolescent type", which are identical in every

way, are conserved in various French and international museums (Ill. 1-6), although the two most significant are the one conserved at the Uffizi Galleries in Florence (Ill. 5) and that found at the Roman villa of Chiragan in the south of France, currently conserved at the Musée Saint-Raymond in Toulouse (Ill. 6). Incidentally, these two works gave the adolescent portrait type its name: the “Uffizi-Toulouse” type.

Sculpted from white marble with a very fine grain, our head presents a subtle brown patina which attests to the passing of time.

Originally, this astonishing ancient Roman head of Marcus Aurelius was mounted on a composition of various antique elements that had been repurposed, making the artwork a composite piece (ill. 7). While the head itself is an authentic Roman artifact, the torso and other sculptural elements were assembled from different ancient fragments to create a harmonious and visually complete sculpture. This practice was particularly common from the Renaissance to the 18th century, when collectors and artists sought to restore and enhance fragmented antiquities by reconstructing them with available pieces. These interventions were meant to revive the grandeur of classical sculptures for display in luxurious private collections.

Our superb bust was part of the collection of the scholar Gustave Clément-Simon (1833 - 1909). A magistrate by training and the public prosecutor of the court of appeal of Aix-en-Provence, he acquired Château de Bach in Naves in 1879 and devoted the last thirty years of his life to historical research and amassing a collection within the château (Ill. 8 and 9). His property in Corrèze housed his vast collection of archives, as well as his eclectic collection of artworks, which included an archaeological gallery. In the monograph on the village of Naves published in 1905, Victor Forot mentioned that Gustave Clément-Simon “travelled

widely (Italy, Greece, Turkey) and brought back artworks, unfortunately uncategorised”. In 1938, the entire collection was sold to Georges Couturon with the château and all its furniture, then passed down within his family.

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Portrait of Marcus Aurelius, Roman, *ca.* AD 140-160/161, marble, H.: 29 cm.

Villa Aldobrandini, Frascati, inv. no. 32.

Ill. 2. Portrait of Marcus Aurelius, Roman, 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 32 cm.

British Museum, London, inv. no. 1873,0820.731.



Ill. 3. Portrait of Marcus Aurelius, Roman, AD 147-151, marble, H.: 37 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. Ma 2258.

Ill. 4. Portrait of Marcus Aurelius, Roman, AD 157-151, marble.

Museo archeologico nazionale di Napoli, Naples, inv. no. 6090.

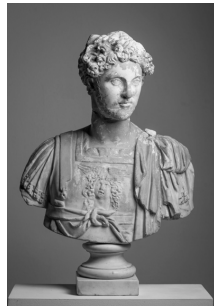


Ill. 5. Portrait of Marcus Aurelius, Roman, AD 139-152, Italian marble, perhaps Apuan, H.: 83,5 cm. Uffizi Galleries, inv. no. 1914 N. 179.
 Ill. 6. Portrait of Caesar Marcus Aurelius, Roman, AD 144-147, marble from Göbekli Tepe, Turkey, H.: 78,5 cm. Musée Saint-Raymond, Toulouse, inv. no. Ra 61 a.



Ill. 8. Château de Bach, Naves, Corrèze.

Provenance:



Ill. 7. Our portrait bust as it was before the restoration.



Ill. 7. Portrait of Gustave Clément-Simon by Alexandre Bertin, 2nd half of the 19th century, once in the library at Château de Bach, H.: 171 cm – W.: 105,5 cm.
 Musée du Cloître de Tulle André Mazeyrie, Tulle.