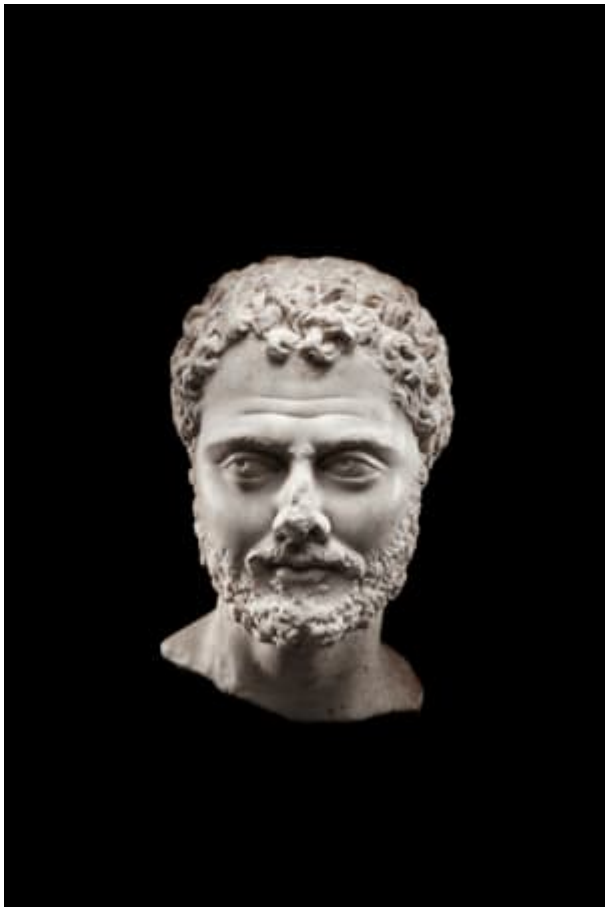

Portrait Bust Of A Bearded Man

Roman

1st - 2nd Century A.D.

Marble

H: 36cm

This life-sized bust displays high-quality Roman portraiture, in a manner which engages the viewer. Carved of marble, the head is turned slightly to the right, with the eyes glancing upwards in the same direction. The cheeks are prominent and fleshy, and the nose deeply saddled and humped. His hair falls high over the upper forehead cut with two wrinkles and is swept back from the temples, framing the ears that have been deeply carved into an 'S-shape'. Overall, the coiffure is short with undulating tufts that, in most cases, do not form complete ringlets, and the conservative use of drills is apparent. The man depicted wears his full beard short, forming a closed mass of tufts with a cleft. The short moustache, slightly parted in the centre, conceals part of the upper lip. Chisel work under the lower lip forms the remnants of a horizontal tuft of hair, which is characteristic of Severan Period portraiture. The characteristics of this portrait overall make it very realistic and expressive. Roman portraiture is often characterised by its unusual level of realism. This contrasts with the idealism so often copied from the Greeks. Aristocrats and dignitaries would have had their likenesses carefully carved in highly accurate detail, with lifelike rendering of hair, skin texture and facial expressionism. The dating and facial characteristics of this portrait could help identify this bust as a depiction of Clodius Albinus, a Roman general and candidate for the imperial title in the years 193-197. He represented the aristocracy of the Latin-speaking West, in contrast to Pescennius Niger, candidate of the Greek-speaking East, and to Lucius Septimius Severus, candidate of the army and Balkan region. Born in the Northern African city of

Hadrumetum (Sousse in Tunisia), to a wealthy family. His name Albinus derives from the fact that he had white skin from the time of his birth. Little is known about the early years of his life, but he is thought to have had a career in the army before becoming a senator in the last years of the reign of the emperor Marcus Aurelius. He fought many successful battles but was ultimately defeated and killed by Severus in a two-day battle of Lugdunum on 19th February 197. As a defeated rival of Septimius Severus, many of his portraits were destroyed or removed from public display. Fewer than twenty marble portraits of Albinus are known, of which majority are held in the collections of important museums. A portrait bust identified as Clodius Albinus can be found in the Musei Capitolini in Rome. The portrait bust has numerous details in common with our bust, including the two wrinkles on the forehead, prominent fleshy cheeks, a deeply saddled and humped nose, the tuft of hair below the lower lip, and the turn of the head and gaze to the right. Other portraits identified as Clodius Albinus with traits similar to the ones described above exist in the collections of Petworth House and Park , Museo Pio Clementino, Palazzo Ducale and the Museo Arqueologico de Cordoba. The comparison of these pieces also supports the identification of this portrait being that of Clodius Albinus rather than Septimius Severus, whom he has often been mistaken for.

Literature:

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