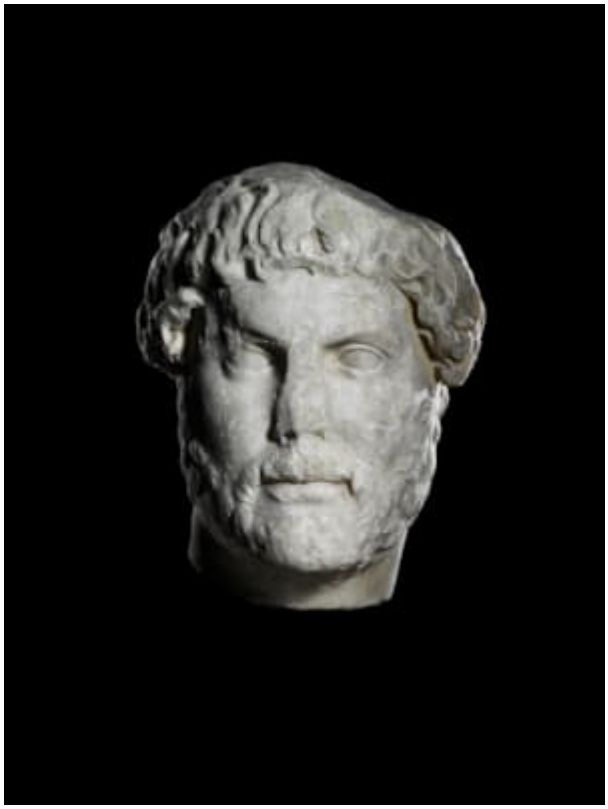


Head of Hadrian

Italy

120-130 A.D., Roman

Marble

H:36cm W:25cm D:25cm

A Roman marble bust of the Emperor Hadrian (76-138). Although the head has been weathered with age, it is still clearly identifiable as Hadrian. It features his thick curls, combed forward towards the forehead, his closely cropped beard and thick moustache, as well as the distinctive fold across his ear lobes. The eyes sit under a strong brow and above the remains of the straight nose.

Hadrian reigned as emperor of Rome between 117 and 138 A.D.. He took over after the failure of Trajan's final Parthian campaign and had to renounce many recently acquired territories in order to solidify the Empire's borders. Because of this, he travelled almost constantly throughout the empire, and initiated an unparalleled building program across its width. As well as Hadrian's Wall, marking the northern limit of Britannia, he rebuilt the Pantheon in Rome and constructed the Temple of Venus and Roma. He may have been responsible for the reconstruction of the Serapeum of Alexandria in Egypt. Hadrian held a strong admiration for Greece: he created a Panhellenic League of cities, and constructed the Temple of Zeus and the Arch of Hadrian in Athens in order to secure the loyalty of the Greek aristocracy.

A large number of portraits of Hadrian survive today, due to the length of his reign as well as his

enduring popularity throughout the Roman Empire. As he came to power at the age of forty-one, Hadrian is depicted as a middle-aged man. He was the first emperor to wear a beard, starting a trend that would continue for several centuries. Some theorise that his beard served as a demonstration of his connection to the Roman legions, as young men on campaign in this period frequently wore beards. Most portraits of Hadrian fall into seven clearly recognised types, as outlined by Max Wegner. This example falls into either the second or third of Wegner's types, which have several overlapping characteristics, dating it to the early Hadrianic period.