



Portrait of a Bearded Roman (possibly Emperor Antoninus Pius)

Date

mid 2nd century

Primary Maker

Artist Unknown

Medium

marble

Description

If the irises were scored and the pupils slightly drilled in the eyes of this fine life-size marble portrait, the identification of the individual as the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius would be almost certain. Antoninus, who was emperor from 138-161, oversaw a prosperous,

peaceful, secure, and powerful state and was the last of the Roman emperors to do so, for economic and military problems would gradually erode the loyalty and resolve of the Roman people over the next centuries. This is the portrait either of the emperor or of someone from the period of his reign who resembled him very closely. The blocklike, stereometric projection of the head is characteristic of Antoninus representations. The cubic structure conveys a sense of force and latent power in the image of the dictator-emperor, especially in combination with a firm, quiet expression, the most typical public demeanor for emperors during the initial two centuries of the Roman Empire. The frontal orientation lends a sense of psychological communication between the figure and the viewer. The Roman people were, and we are today, permitted a confrontation that is intimate, subtle, and personal, as we come into the immediate presence of an awesome ruler. The cutting through the neck precludes certainty as to whether the head was originally a bust or part of a life-size statue. In the latter case, it might have been reasoned that a bust would be easier to transport and sell.

Dimensions

Overall: 11 3/4 x 10 3/8 x 9 1/2 in. (29.8 x 26.4 x 24.1 cm)