

M. E. S.

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SOME PORTRAITS OF ROMAN EMPRESSES

By GUIDO CALZA

IT SEEMS to me that it may be observed—and I do not know whether the observation has ever been made—that Roman Art, while attaining effects in portraiture superior to, perhaps, and certainly different from those attained in Greek Art, usually produced less interesting portraits of women than of men. In fact, it is quite obvious that an Art, which tends to individualize rather than to idealize, disposes of more limited means of reproduction and artistic perfection in female than in male portraits, and, for this reason, it may never seize upon the full possibilities of human perfection, physical as well as moral, yet reproduce with living strength the wrinkles of age and the grin of hideousness, the signs of vulgarity and a shade of idiocy, brute strength and sensual lethargy. But the psychological expression is limited in woman to a gamut of sentiments that are, in fact, far more clearly defined in life than in Art—if, like Roman Art, it does not seek to create an ideal type, but would reproduce living models. And the physical expression is rarely without beauty in extreme age, since it gathers from the mobility of a woman's face the few characteristic traits that serve to individualize a type without diminishing its aesthetic effects. So, there is more suggestion than strength in Roman female portraits, more art than vivacity, more superficiality than penetration. They are—in a certain sense—more adaptable to artistic criticism than the portraits of men, in which the personality of the artist and the evolu-

tion of style veil, somewhat, the suggestiveness of the type, the stronger racial individuality, the more clearly accentuated expression of character.

But the portraits of women share the importance, equally with those of men, of presenting Roman society to us in the various phases of history. Just as it has been possible to follow the evolution of the idea of Imperial Rome in the portraits of men, so those of women completely illustrate the evolution of the Roman woman in society, and, also, in the characteristics of her race and education, ever changing from age to age. The women of the refined and elegant Antoninian Society and Livia's "Orientali," who will make their entrance into the Imperial Palace with Julia Domna, present a new type of beauty, a new effeminacy—the personifications and indexes of the contemporaneous intellectual, moral and religious typology (if one may use the word) of a society that prepared our own.

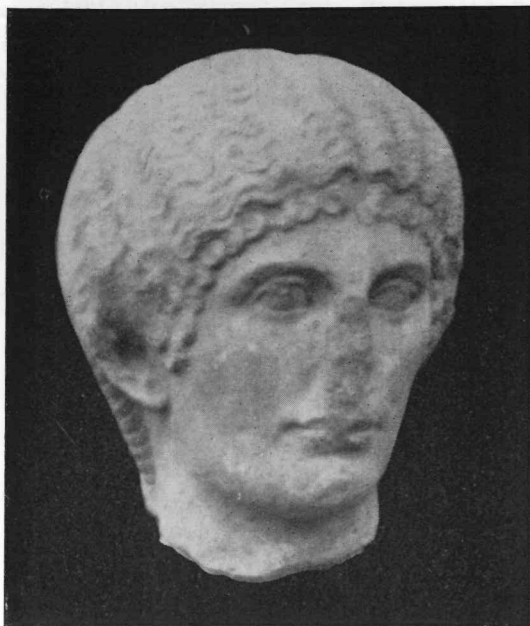
The busts I have collected here were taken from the inexhaustible soil of Ostia, and are of pure-blooded Roman women—if the identification I propose for them does not err. It does seem that the light of the names, also, might illumine them, but this has often been denied us, rendering the joy of discovery less complete, and less intense in our enthusiasm for the work of art.

The headdress, which constitutes, by its very changeableness, one of the best chronological and typological indexes of female portraiture, indicates the age coinciding with the Julian-Claudian dynasty.



AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME, PORTA SAN PANCRAZIO, ROME, ITALY.

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY



PORTRAIT HEAD OF LIVIA, WIFE OF AUGUSTUS,
FOUND AT OSTIA

LIVIA

The hair is roughly sketched on the Ostia head, and is dressed in the fashion we find in the few portraits attributed to Livia and Antonia, which continued in favor under the Claudians, reappearing just once, in the time of Plotina, but profoundly modified with the hair on top of the head. The hair is almost invisibly parted in the middle, and combed back to the nape of the neck in the softest waves, coming together in a heavy braid that falls down behind on the shoulders. A crown of curls in single or sometimes double rows overshadows the line between the face and the roots of the hair.

The identification of this as Livia, the wife of Augustus, rests almost exclusively on coins and gems, and on a resemblance to her son, Tiberius, which has made it possible to give the generally-accepted name of Livia to a beautiful head in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek; and it is with this one

that the Ostia head should be compared; and the comparison seems convincing to me. Some differences are due less to its representing a different personage than to the fact that it is a rough sketch, and to the quality and condition of the porous, corroded marble, which rob us of the lights and shadows and surfaces in the modeling.

Perhaps the Ostia head is not contemporary with Livia, who lived eighty-five years, and is represented already quite old—according to the most recent and apparently acceptable identification—in a statue in the Naples Museum, the so-called “Seated Agrippina.” (Journal of Roman studies, 1914, page 139.) And our portrait bears a strong analogy to it, also. Our head may date from the time of Claudius, who wished Livia deified in the year 41, although Tiberius had refused divine honors for his mother and for himself.

Yet it is not solely because of the similarity in feature that it seems to me possible to propose such an identification, but also because it reflects so much of Livia’s beauty and character. The slightly irreverent expression of Caligula, who called her *Ulixes stolatus* (Suetonius, “Caligula,” 23, 8.) comes to mind, when we look at this image, which seems, at first sight, almost like the idealized portrait of a man. It shows us a cold type of beauty, a composed expression, a face trained to false serenity and affable energy, recalling what Tacitus tells us: “She possessed virtues worthy of the women of Ancient Rome, but expressed with greater affability of manner: a despotic mother, a complacent wife, she succeeded in harmonizing the falseness of her son with the ability of her husband.” (Annals V, I). The absence of the nose de-

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PORTRAIT HEAD OF LIVIA IN THE NY CARLSBERG
GLYPTOTHEK, COPENHAGEN

prives us of the line of her energetic, clear-cut profile; yet, notwithstanding this mutilation, the characteristics of her type appear distinctly, and are the same as in the head at Ny Carlsberg: the structure of the rather emaciated face, in which are prominent the hard lines of the jaws, the small receding chin, the rather thin lips, and the little eyes set into the inner angles of their sockets. The expression is that of a woman, who wishes to and can dissimulate the defects in her own virtue beneath a mask of coldness and pride, because it is, above all, on her proud mother-love, that her life hinges; and her character manifests itself in it. It has taught her asperity and dissimulation, the grief of being conquered and the desire to triumph, and is the cause of the suspicion perhaps even of the crime of wishing to kill Augustus himself.

Among the busts of the women of the first half of the first century, I have seen no stronger physical resemblance, no more faithful expression of character, than is portrayed in the very incompleteness of this portrait-head with the face of Livia, such as historical and artistic tradition have transmitted her to us.

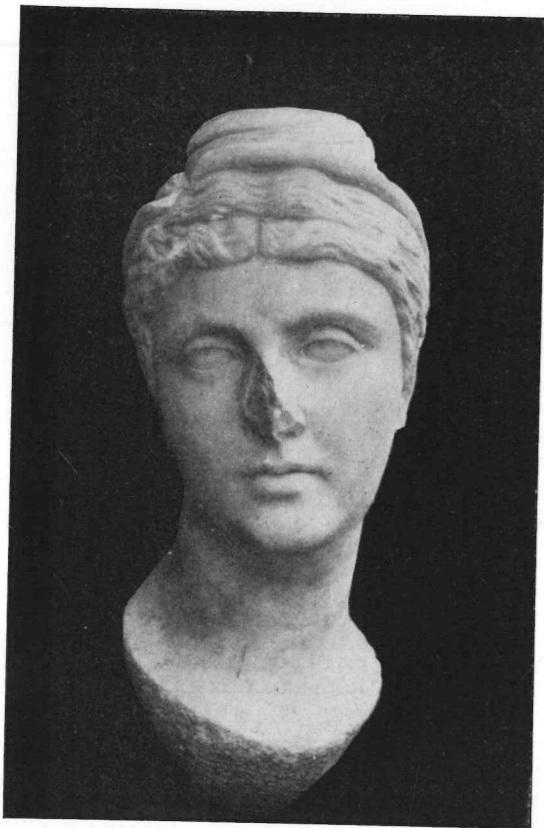


COIN WITH EFFIGY
OF FAUSTINA
SENIOR

The portrait of Faustina Senior, the wife of Antoninus Pius reproduces quite a different character, quite a different type of beauty. Its identification leaves no room for doubt; and is established, not only by the testimony of coins, but by a resemblance to the bust at Naples, with which our head compares very exactly.

The head dress is the one Faustina preferred and with which she is always

represented on coins as well as in sculpture. The softly undulated hair leaves almost the whole forehead uncovered, and the ears also, forming a wave in front of them, then coming together on the nape of the neck, where it is drawn up to the top of the head in a sort of basket of twisted braids. This knot of braids—of false hair, certainly—must have been carved in a separate piece of marble, which is lacking on our head. This coiffure is not altogether artificial; and the slender band of the diadem that encircles the head lends it regal solemnity. But it is the matronly, queenly beauty of this Empress, who never knew old age, that is more imposing than all else. She died at thirty-six years of age, and is represented here in the fullness of maturity, in all the fascination of womanhood; austere, yet seductive. The full outline of the face, the profile of the nose which springs directly from



PORTRAIT HEAD OF FAUSTINA SENIOR, WIFE OF ANTONINUS PIUS, FOUND AT OSTIA

the forehead without depression, the soft sensual mouth, the strong, round chin, whose roundness continues down into the throat and robust neck, are the most characteristic features of a well-known type of beauty, still purely Roman then, and which always will be Roman.

We know little of her, except that, as the chronicler of Antoninus Pius says: "Many stories, which the best of husbands suppressed within his grief-stricken soul, were told about her, on account of the too great freedom and too great frivolity of her life (Historia Aug., Pius, 3, 7): Words not so obscure as to make us credit a malevolent insinuation, not so clear as to make

us condemn the wife with the woman, the mother with the wife. We also feel in this portrait the imperious fascination of the seductive woman, that Faustina must have exercised with complete success in the frivolous, elegant cultured society composing the court during the Antoninian epoch, an epoch similar to our own in many respects. This is a figure of the Empire, dating, perhaps, some time before Faustina's elevation to the Imperial Dominion, which she enjoyed for only three years. Her death grieved a husband, who wished her memory honored and consecrated in the pomp of the games, as well as by the erection of statues and temples. Yet her frivolity may never have even reached those limits, which her daughter, Faustina Minor, surpassed, instead, to the disdain of all. And we recognize her brilliant qualities as a woman in the family and in public life, in the affection shown by her husband, even after her death, and in that charitable institution, *Puellae Faustinianae*, the conception of which, at least, was due to her. The Ostia portrait reproduces her with the master-hand of an art that was wise in its own strength.

Uncertainty of identification weighs, instead, on the third of these portraits, which is not less interesting and noble than the other two; but is, in fact, far more individual, from certain points of view, since it detaches itself from the usual manner of Roman commercial portraits by vigor of expression and refinement of style, and by the complex, yet skillful modeling. The epoch to which this head belongs does not seem doubtful to me. Although it has been impossible to find another



COIN WITH EFFIGY OF DOMITIA LUCILLA

perfectly identical, and the details are not clear in the coin I offer by way of identification, the headdress is the same as that on Faustina's portrait, but a little more artificial. The hair forms a wave in front of the ears, which remain uncovered here, also, but binds the forehead more closely, and is arranged about it in stiffer, less natural waves than on Faustina's head. Then the hair is gathered together on the nape of the neck, and drawn up to the crown of the head in the same twisted braids, forming that sort of basket, which has been carved separately in a slightly different marble, and attached here, just as we have observed on the other head. There exists, then, almost perfect identity of head-dress, and one may, perhaps, say—identity of workmanship between the two heads as if they were from the same chisel. It is absolutely necessary, on the contrary, to exclude identity of personality, of which the analogy between the head-dresses and the similarity in the style of the two sculptures might lead us to think.

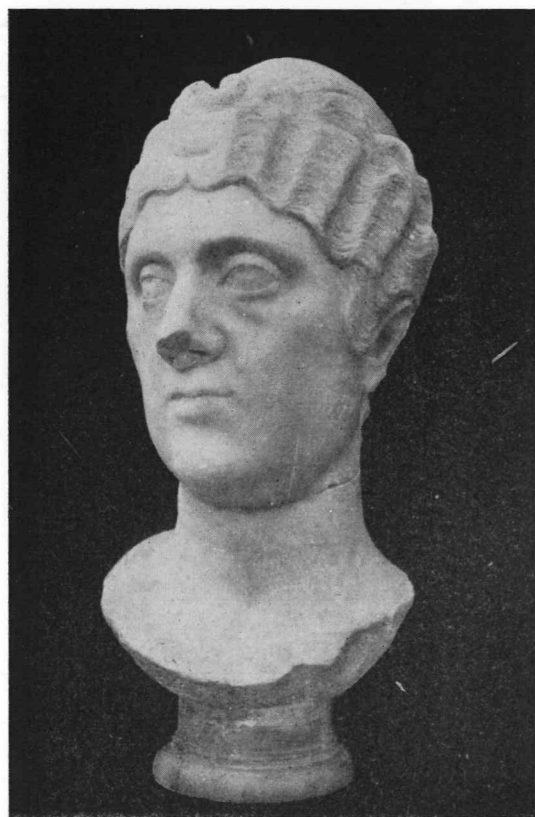
The structure of the rather bony face, in which the rigid line of the cheek-bone and jaw is so individual, and the shape of the eye almost like a circumflex accent, is quite different from Faustina's. The line of the nose is different, not straight like Faustina's, but curved in a little at the root. Nor, in fact, is the shape of the mouth like hers, nor the profile of the chin, nor the modeling of the cheeks, which lends a tinge of sadness to this face, almost ageing it, though it is still in the fullness of maturity.

No; this is not Faustina, this woman in whom austere dignity seems to prevail—rather than beauty—and serene firmness, an almost philosophical disdain of life, which (as one may read



PORTRAIT-HEAD OF FAUSTINA SENIOR, FOUND AT OSTIA—PROFILE

in her face) was lived and dominated with tranquil energy. Nor should this portrait be confounded with that of a woman of the middle class, for all indicates exceptional nobility, an almost queenly presence. And, among all the court-ladies of this period, it reminds me only of Domitia Lucilla, the mother of Marcus Aurelius. The similarity between this bust and the only effigy we have of her, on a Nicene coin, seems evident to me, in spite of imperfections in the mintage; the head-dress—so far as can be judged—is identical, certainly more similar than to those of other sculptures. What is more, a resemblance between mother and son is undeniable: Marcus Aurelius had the same facial structure



PORTRAIT-HEAD OF DOMITIA LUCILLA, MOTHER OF MARCUS AURELIUS, FOUND AT OSTIA

with high cheek-bones, eyes of the same form, set in deep sockets, slightly receding cheeks, and the same shaped mouth.

We know little of Domitia Lucilla, who was the wife of the Praetor Annius Verus. As it appears that she died in 155 of our era, she could not have seen her son as Emperor; nor did she imagine that Pertinax, who was educated by her, would one day become Emperor.

Though she never ascended the throne, she lived close to it, and two Emperors were prepared in her household. She reveals herself to us in the education she gave her son, and in her two letters (preserved for us by Fronto), just as this portrait shows her: a woman of intelligence and marked ability.



It is not surprising that her portrait should be at Ostia, the city that was so devoted to the Antoninian Dynasty; but it is surprising that there remains, in all the series of Imperial Roman portraits, only one effigy of this *Domina Mater*, as Marcus Aurelius calls her. And I permit myself to hope that the identification, proposed by me, may lead to further knowledge of this interesting woman.

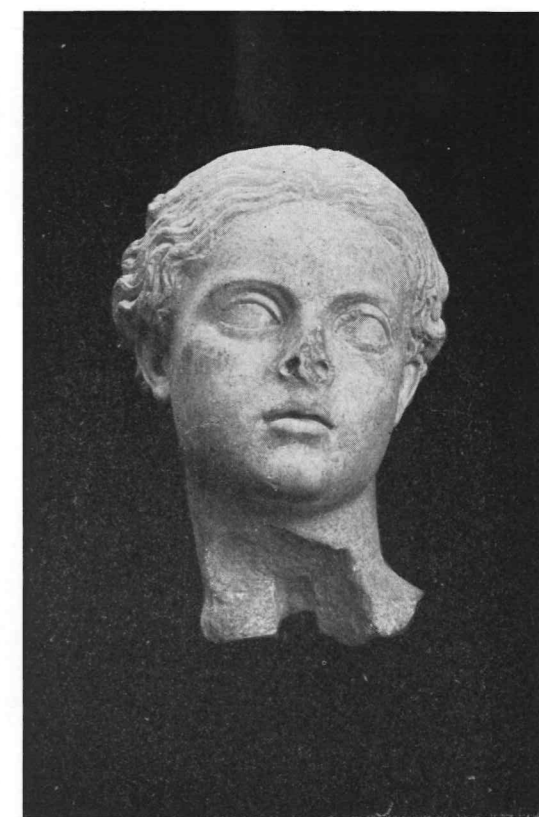
THE ROMAN PRINCESS

The portraits, just examined, represent mature women in the fullness of their beauty. But here is another, no less important and perfect than the others, which represents a young girl with a frank, energetic expression, and a certain mischievous air, like an im-



PORTRAIT-HEAD OF A YOUNG ROMAN PRINCESS OF THE BEGINNING OF THE EMPIRE

pertinent, vivacious child. This is a Roman portrait—head on a figure of Artemis, the Huntress, a beautiful piece of Greek sculpture. In fact, the headdress is not Roman, but rather after the style of Praxiteles: the hair is parted on the forehead, then gathered up on the nape of the neck in a big knot, that loosens out, after being fastened, into a crown of curls. This is a graceful way of dressing the hair, but, unfortunately, it is not Roman, which makes it difficult to identify the portrait and determine its epoch.



Who can she be—the princess of this portrait? We might think of Julia, the daughter of Augustus, but we have not sufficient proofs to decide. The few Roman princesses of the first century of the Empire are little known, and the very few portraits on coins represent them at a mature age. But even if it has not been possible to throw the light of a name upon this image of a Roman maiden, she is illumined by the potent art which sculptured her, and which has given her to us—almost living, after twenty centuries.

Rome, Italy.