

# DESMET

## FINE ART

Bust of Marcus Aurelius (121-180 AD)

Bust of Domitianus (51-96 AD)

Italian, 19<sup>th</sup> century

White marble

H 74 cm (Marcus Aurelius)

H 70 cm (Domitianus)



Marcus Aurelius, the celebrated Roman philosopher-emperor, was known by history as the last of the Five Good Emperors. He was reared in the Imperial court, and through a series of adoptions and marriages, was established as successor to the Emperor Antoninus Pius. Rising to power in 161 A.D. at the age of 40, Marcus reigned for almost 20 years, his first six years as co-regent with Lucius Verus. Portraiture of Marcus reflects the advancing stages of his life. Representations of him as a young man show him with a full head of tousled curls (see, for example, the portrait from Berlin, pl. 1 a-d in Fittschen, *Prinzenbildnisse Antoninischer Zeit*), and gradually he acquires a wispy beard and mustache (see fig. 235, p. 271 in Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*). By the time Marcus was crowned Emperor, he is portrayed with the same halo of curls, but now with the full beard of a philosopher, complete with individual parallel curling locks, as visible here. This portrait can be categorized as Type 4 or the Capitoline Imperatori 38 Type, named for what is considered the best surviving example (fig. 237 in Kleiner, op. cit.). Created between 170-180 A.D., toward the end of his principate, it portrays the mature and aging emperor. As Kleiner describes (p. 271ff., op. cit.): "Portraits made at the end of Marcus's principate are extraordinary human documents, because they not only incorporate the aging process but also mirror the state of mind of the philosopher-emperor. It is not surprising that the earliest instance of psychological penetration in Roman portraiture should coincide with the principate of a deep thinker thoroughly imbued with Stoic ideas."

Titus Flavius Domitianus was the second son of the future emperor Vespasian and Flavia Domitilla. As emperor, Domitian was hated by the aristocracy. From the Trajanic writers Tacitus and Pliny the Younger (Suetonius is less partisan) it is hard to disentangle

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stock vituperation from genuine belief, but it seems certain that cruelty and ostentation were the chief grounds of his unpopularity, rather than any military or administrative incompetence. Indeed, his strict control over magistrates in Rome and the provinces won Suetonius' praise. In his secretariat he used both freedmen and knights, some of whom retained their posts after his death; and his *consilium* of close advisers, including senators, involved no departure from precedent. In legislation he was severe, and he incurred censure for attempting to curb vices from which he himself was not immune. It might be fairer to criticize him for undue paternalism. An edict ordaining destruction of half the provincial vineyards was typical: it was designed to encourage the growing of grain and to limit the importing of wine into Italy (where, meanwhile, no increased output was permitted), but Domitian was unable to carry the matter through. Pliny the Younger's letters to Trajan show that Domitian's administrative decisions were not usually revoked.

His military and foreign policy was not uniformly successful. Domitian was the first emperor since Claudius (43) to campaign in person. Both in Britain and in Germany advances were made by the Romans early in the reign, and the construction of the Rhine-Danube *limes* ("fortified line") owes more to Domitian than to any other emperor. But consolidation in Scotland was halted by serious wars on the Danube, where Domitian never achieved an entirely satisfactory settlement and, worse still, lost two legions and many other troops. This, though admitted even by Tacitus to be due to the slackness or rashness of his commanders, was naturally held against Domitian at Rome. It did not affect his popularity with the army, however, whose pay he had wisely raised by one-third in AD 84.

The real issue was his own constitutional and ceremonial position. He continued his father's policy of holding frequent consulates (he was consul *ordinaries* every year from 82 to 88); he became censor for life in 85, with consequent control over senatorial membership and general behaviour; he wore triumphal dress in the Senate; and he presided, wearing Greek dress and a golden crown, over four yearly games on the Greek model, with his fellow judges wearing crowns bearing his own effigy among effigies of the gods. According to Suetonius, a grave source of offense was his insistence on being addressed as *dominus et deus* ("master and god").

### Related Literature

K.Fittschen, *Prinzenbildnisse Antoninischer Zeit*, Beiträge zur Erschliessung hellenistischer und kaiserzeitlicher Skulptur und Architektur, Band 18, (Mainz-am-Rhein, 1999).  
D.E.E.Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, (Yale – 2002).