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1. *The Missouri Crispina.*

## A Portrait of the Empress Crispina

**B**ruttia Crispina was the daughter of Lucius Fulvius Bruttius Praesens and she was married to the Roman emperor-designate Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus in A.D. 177 or 178.<sup>1</sup> In honor of the union the ruling emperor Marcus Aurelius gave a *congiarium*, or distribution of largess, to the people.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this promising beginning, the marriage was not a happy one, and Crispina was

exiled to Capreae (the island of Capri) and eventually executed there. The cause of her banishment was alleged to have been either adultery<sup>3</sup> or plotting to overthrow the emperor in A.D. 182.<sup>4</sup> Several inscriptions suggest, however, that she may have survived as the wife of Commodus as late as A.D. 187,<sup>5</sup> but it is not likely that she lived much beyond this date. At any rate, the emperor's mistress during the last years



2. Above: *three-quarter views of the Missouri Crispina.*

3. Below: *rear and side views, showing a tenon for attachment of separately made bun.*





4. Coin of the Empress Crispina, A.D. 181/2. On the reverse Salus feeding a serpent before an altar.

5. Portrait of Crispina at a later time, showing a more matronly hair style. Capitoline Museum, Rome.



of his rule was a certain woman named Marcia.<sup>6</sup>

Only eleven portrait busts of this relatively obscure empress have been catalogued by Wegner (whose work is the main source for Antonine portraiture)<sup>7</sup> and many of these are in poor condition or are of mediocre quality. A new addition to the list is the portrait shown in Figures 1-3.<sup>8</sup>

The head, of white marble, exhibits the characteristics typical of early portraits of Crispina, already well established from her coins (Fig. 4).<sup>9</sup> Most distinctive is the hair styling, a variant of the melon-ribbed hair of Faustina the Younger and Lucilla, Commodus' sister. The large, high roll of hair which surrounds her forehead and continues over the ears to the nape of the neck is the principal trademark of her early portraits.<sup>10</sup> On her coins one can see that this hair style was normally completed at the back by a large bun which was coiled into two or three circular braids. The bun is missing from the Missouri Crispina, but the back of the head has been flattened out and roughly chiseled away, leaving a tenon of marble to facilitate the attachment of the separately made bun (see Fig. 3).<sup>11</sup> Wegner asserts that the melon-ribbed hair style was worn by Faustina the Younger, Lucilla and Crispina in their younger years before these Augustae adopted a more matronly, conservative hair style, as shown in Figure 5.<sup>12</sup> Thus, on this basis, it is possible to suggest that the portrait belongs to the earlier part of her reign, perhaps about A.D. 180.

The flat profile of the brow, the long neck and the arrangement of the hair which fully reveals the ears are characteristic of Crispina's portraits. Also typical are the small and full lips, the doubly arcuated upper lip and the pronounced fossette at each corner of the mouth. But aside from these brief hints at individualization, there is little to differentiate her facial features from those of Faustina the Younger or Lucilla.<sup>13</sup>

The wide eyes with heavy lids and drilled, circular centers, the scarcely modulated planes of the forehead and cheeks and the rigid bilateral symmetry of the face are typically Antonine features. The smooth, wrinkle-free surface retains, however, something of the



6. Young Crispina in the Terme Museum, Rome.

feeling of Hadrianic portraiture and does not yet exhibit the stylized Neo-verism which begins in the Severan period.

The Missouri Crispina is a greatly idealized Augusta, in keeping with her coinage, which subtly associates the empress with such divinities as Ceres, Venus Felix and Juno. It should also be noted that she was the wife of an emperor who associated himself with Hercules.<sup>14</sup>

The exceptional quality of the head ranks it among the finest surviving portraits of the young Crispina, including the excellent example in the Terme Museum in Rome (Fig. 6).<sup>15</sup> Wegner believes that the Terme Crispina suggests an intelligent individual with a certain amiable charm.<sup>16</sup> But her sculpture hides more than it reveals, and the intense drilling of the eyes suggests that she is turning away from the Roman world and looking toward the Middle Ages.

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<sup>1</sup> Little is known about the father of Crispina. He may have held two consulships (in A.D. 153 and 180). Crispina had a brother, Lucius Bruttius Quintus Crispinus, who was consul in 187. The family apparently had a mausoleum located outside of Rome between the Via Appia and the

Via Ardeatina. A useful source for information about the family is Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopaedie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* III (Stuttgart 1890) 914-915. See also William Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* I (New York 1967) 507.

<sup>2</sup> *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (Loeb edition, David Magie ed.), Marcus Antoninus XXVII. 8 (hereafter SHA).

<sup>3</sup> SHA, Commodus Antoninus V. 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Dio Cassius, *History* LXXIII. 4. 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III. 12487 and *CIL* VIII<sup>1</sup>. 16530. Lucilla, sister of Commodus, was exiled for plotting to kill her brother, but Dio is probably right in including Crispina among the conspirators. Since Crispina's brother was consul in A.D. 187, it is believed that she may have remained in favor until at least that date.

<sup>6</sup> SHA, Commodus Antoninus XI. 9; Harold Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire, British Museum Catalogue of Roman Coins IV* (London 1940) 154. Marcia had been the mistress of one Ummidius Quadratus, who later took part in the assassination plot against Commodus and was put to death. Marcia was later executed by the emperor Julianus, who reigned only briefly.

<sup>7</sup> Max Wegner, *Die Herrscherbildnisse in antoninischer Zeit* (Berlin 1939) 74-78, 274-276. A head with a coiffure somewhat similar to that of the Missouri Crispina has recently been found in the Athenian Agora but the woman does not appear to be Crispina. See T. Leslie Shear, Jr., "The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1971," *Hesperia* 42 (1973) 172 and pl. 38a.

<sup>8</sup> Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia, No. 74.145, height 24.7 cm., width (ear to ear) 17.7 cm. There are no modern repairs, although spectrographic analysis indicated slight surface abrasion above the left brow, continuing to the left side of the nose, and also on the right naso-labial fold. The lower left portion of the nose is broken and the upper area of the left ear has been slightly chipped. Both ears show evidence of abrasion.

<sup>9</sup> Photograph courtesy of Dr. Herbert Cahn. "Vente publique 52: Monnaies grecques, romaines et byzantines," *Muenzen und Medaillen* (1975) pl. 41, no. 682.

<sup>10</sup> Wegner, *op. cit.*, 76 and pl. 64 p. [Here the references are wrongly given by Wegner as pl. 60—Ed.]

<sup>11</sup> For a head treated in a similarly dovetailed manner, see *Ancient Art: The Norbert Schimmel Collection*, Oscar W. Muscarella ed. (Mainz 1974) No. 97.

<sup>12</sup> Wegner, *op. cit.*, 275, pl. 52. For another portrait of Crispina which is also later in date, see Wegner pl. 64, m. Additional portrait heads of the older Crispina are discussed by Jutta Meischner, "Zum Bildnis der Kaiserin Crispina," *Jahrbuch des deutschen archaologischen Instituts* 76 (1961) 188-192.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, 74.

<sup>14</sup> Herodian I. 7.5-6; I.17.12. For the well known portrait of Commodus as Hercules in the Conservatori Museum in Rome, see Mortimer Wheeler, *Roman Art and Architecture* (London 1964) 170. The emperor wears the lion skin, holds a club in his right hand and the apples of the Hesperides in his left.

<sup>15</sup> Wegner, *op. cit.*, pl. 57.

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.*, 78.