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Agrippina's Portrait in Connection with Roman Female Portraits From *Ager Polensis* and *Ager Nesactiensis*

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During protective archaeological researches performed in 1987-1988, on the Forum of Colonia Pola marble head was found representing Agrippina, wife of Claudius and mother of Nero. Three inscriptions mentioning Claudius and Nero had been discovered before on the Pula Forum. Since Agrippina had great influence on Claudius' political actions, her portraits were usually put in places where homage could be paid to the Emperor and his family. In addition to the Agrippina's portrait from Colonia Pola, there are some more female portraits resembling to her.

Key words: Claudius, Nero, inscriptions, Agrippina Minor, portrait, funeral monuments.

Introduction

Pula is one of many Mediterranean antique cities, and the roots of its existence go back to the mysterious mythological ideas of the Greek period.¹ The oldest name of the Roman colony Pula is mentioned by Pliny the Elder in his "Naturalis Historiae": *In colonia Pola, quae nunc Pietas Iulia*.² The formation of the colony of Pula dates back into Caesar's period. As a Caesarean colony, the city has been founded in the period between 46 and 45 BC with the purpose of being one of many strongholds of Roman conquest in the Adriatic area from Trieste to Greece³. After the civil war in 42 BC and Octavian's victory at Actium in 31 BC, Pula was plundered and destroyed.⁴ As a symbol of the victory at Actium, one of the most beautiful triumphal arches of the Augustan period was built in the years between 29 and 27 BC – the triumphal arch of the Sergi, a masterpiece of Roman art.⁵ Augustus' *Pax Iulia* makes Pula a real imperial city with all the characteristics of Roman urbanization.⁶ In the period of the Roman empire the name of the city is *Colonia Iulia Pola Pollentia Herculanea* as it can be read in the city edict of the 2nd century.⁷

Monuments speak about the social and economic position of Pula in the Roman empire.⁸

People have created works of art according to a certain level of development, drawing the inspiration out of socio-political relations and relying on real situations. Besides by architecture, the antique art during the 1st century AD is dominated by plasticity realized in realistic representations and modified by determinate imperial influences – the Augustan sublimity and Flavian realism. It was common usage to represent a person realistically in a portrait and to put such a portrait on a private or public place in the city or necropolis for the family or citizens to view. Thanks to the interest of the commissioners, in equal number patrician and plebeian, this branch of art or craft – plastic portrait – had considerably progressed.⁹

Description of the portrait

1. The finding of the portrait of Agrippina Minor, (fig. 1, 1a) the wife of the emperor Claudius and mother of the emperor Nero, found in 1988 in Pula on the south-eastern side of the forum



Fig. 1. and Fig. 1a. Pula, the portrait of Agrippina Minor, mid of the 1st C

in a room where her figure was admired, induced to thinking about the influence of fashion and the imitation of this empress in the portrait characteristics and on tomb stones.¹⁰

The portrait of Agrippina Minor is made of marble in a larger than natural size and is characterized by wavy hair on the forehead which finishes in locks descending along a strong neck. The eyes are expressive, the nose is a bit wide but damaged and the mouth is sensual and marked.¹¹

2. The tombstone stele from Pula (fig. 3) made of limestone is characterized by the image of the deceased placed in a rectangular aedicule which has two itifalic hermae representing Seraphis on its sides.¹² The inscription *Obelia Maxima* can be seen beneath the aedicule. The portrait of the deceased has been considerably damaged so that the face is barely recognizable. Part of the hair, cloth and drapery as well as the position of the arms have been preserved. The portrait is the work of a master. The veil frames the face and falls in three folds behind the ears towards the shoulders. In this way the veil holds the hair revealing the face and neck in clean lines. The figure was conceived in the usual form but the stone-mason liberated it from its rigidity and gave it an elegant look thanks to his fine and masterly working. The stele with a series of minute details looks very luxurious and elegant, enriched with symbolic and appropriate elements. Because of the oriental motives which appear with the deceased, we can suppose that the master was of oriental or orientalizing origin. Analyzing the single elements makes us think that the deceased was probably an immigrant by origin or married to an immigrant. She was considered to be

1 Križman 1979, str. 41-44.

2 Plini Secundi, XXXVII, 3, 129; Križman 1979, str. 238.

3 Frascchetti 1983, str. 77-102; Jurkić 1987, str. 67.

4 Bandelli 1983, str. 167-175; Bandelli 1985, str. 62-68; Matijašić 1991, str. 235-251.

5 Traversari 1971, str. 47; Džin 1997, str. 93-99.

6 Mlakar 1958, str. 20-29; Forlatti Tamaro 1971, str. 11-22; Fischer 1996, str. 6-12; Matijašić 1996, str. 47-125.

7 Inscriptiones Italiae, X/I, 1947, str. 85.

8 Cambi 2002, str. 130.

9 Cambi 2000, str. 42-47.

10 Bolšec Ferri 1989, str. 8-10; Bolšec Ferri 1990, str. 149-151; Starac 1997, str. 1-2; Džin 1999, str. 29-32.

11 Matijašić 1993, str. 47-52; Cambi 2000, str. 44.

12 Inscriptiones Italiae, X/I, 1947, str. 335.



Fig. 2. Val Sudiga near Galižana, the portraits of man and wife on funeral ara, 1st half of the 1st C



Fig. 3. Pula, the tombstone of Obelia Maxima, mid of the 1st C



Fig. 4. Savolago near Galižana, the portrait of a woman, mid of the 1st C BC.



Fig. 5. Pula, the female portrait on the tombstone, mid of the 1st C

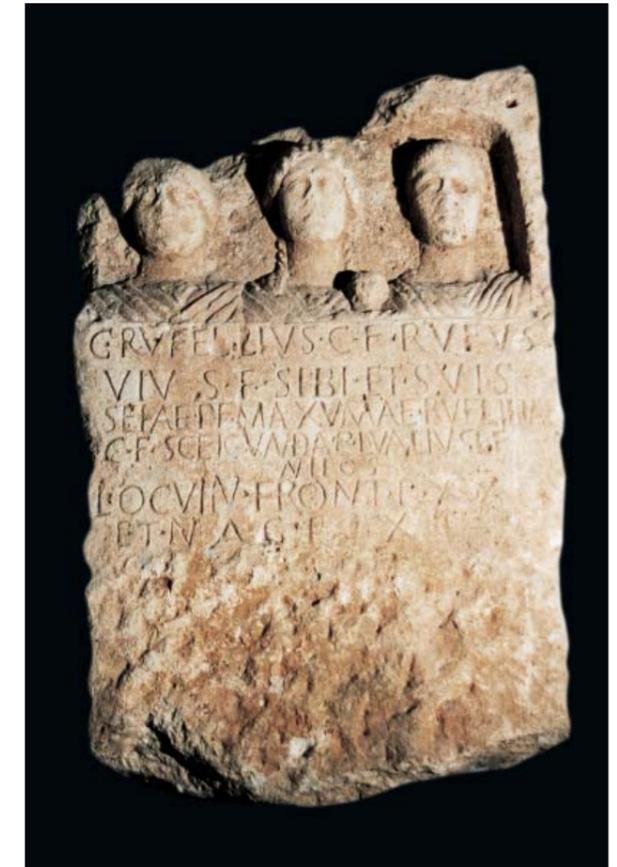


Fig. 6. Mali Vareški (Nesactium), family tombstone of Gaius Rufellius Rufus, mid of the 1st C

a priestess of the oriental cult.¹³ The analysis of the style of working of the stele as well as the making of the head and the figure shows that the monument can be dated to the middle of the 1st century.¹⁴

3. The stele of the unknown woman is one of the best preserved tombstone monuments from Savolago near Galižana (fig 4).¹⁵ The portrait is extremely realistic. A well preserved figure of a young woman or girl with the realistically combed hair, in itself the most important element of the portrait of the deceased, has been carved in the deep rounded aedicule. The hair is parted in the middle in soft, thick waves and gathered behind the ears into a thick curly lock falling to the shoulders behind each ear. This is the most beautiful and the most realistic representation of hair among the portraits in the antique collection of the Archaeological Museum of Istria. The hair frames the face with prominent cheeks and a slightly retracted and dimpled chin. Marked eyebrows stand above the large eyes. The nose has a damaged tip but it shows that it was

straight and slightly bent downwards. The long neck of the deceased gives the head a distinctive look and is decorated with a necklace made of separated pearls threaded on a chain. The woman is dressed in a rich dress falling gently in rich drapes and forming a discrete opening on the breasts.¹⁶ The hands are bent on the chest and covered to the wrists. Such subtle and skillful making of the bust from the realistically shaped head to the meticulously executed details indicates an artist who, in this way, gave his figure an appearance of calmness and sublime dignity, still not depriving it of real worldly beauty. On the basis of the hairdo it is dated into the first half of the 1st century.¹⁷

4. The fragmented stele with the partly preserved figure of the deceased in a polygonal aedicule with geometrically executed profiling of the *timpanon* appears esthetically neat and sophisticated (fig. 5).¹⁸ The hairdo is the most worked on part of the portrait. The thick hair is parted in the middle and descends in waves to the ears where, gathered

13 Jurkić 2001, str. 17; Jurkić 2005, str. 216-217.

14 Jurkić 1972, 367.

15 Gnirs 1911, str. 43.

16 Jurkić 1972, str. 365.

17 Jurkić 1972, str. 368.

18 Jurkić 1972, str. 362.



Fig. 7. Nesactium, the portrait of the goddess Eia, an unknown woman, 1st half of the 1st C

in locks, it comes down on the shoulders which have not been preserved. That kind of lock is best visible behind the left ear. For its manner and form, the hairdo completely corresponds to the previous representations of hair and is the most important dating element. The face is damaged but the lines of the damaged cheeks can be made out. The right, better preserved eye has the shape of an almond, is quite horizontal and gives the face an open, clear expression. The tip of the nose is knocked off but the preserved contours let us deduce that it was strong in the base while the rounded chin points out a prominent mouth. On the basis of the preserved details it can be noticed that the portrait was plastically and realistically worked. As only the left part of the stele, having a figure eccentrically inserted in the polygonal aedicule, has been preserved, according to the rule of symmetry there had to be another figure.¹⁹ This theory is confirmed by the architecture of the stele. The stele and the portrait can be dated in the middle of the 1st century.

5. The tombstone stele with four figures (Mali Vareški – ager of *Nesactium* (fig. 6)), three of which are adult figures carved in the same height while the infantile figure has been inserted among the deceased. This monumental tombstone of aedicular form contains four characters:²⁰ *Gaius Rufellius Rufus* who had this monument made during his lifetime for himself and his wife *Seia Maxuma*, carved on the right side; the other female character is *Rufellia Secunda*, *Gaius'* daughter, while the infantile character, of a bit less fine making, is *Lucius Val*.

The faces of the deceased are well preserved, characterized by expressiveness and individuality, so that all four portraits make a single artistic unit. The female character of *Seia Maxuma*, with thick hair, has been very realistically worked. The hairdo is parted in the middle and falls evenly in rich waves while it is gathered in a short braid finishing in a lock behind the ears. This hairdo is significant for the dating of the stele, but the modified braid shows a local variant of the usual fashion. Since we know this kind of hair dressing and its more or less modified variants from the other portraits, we can conclude that the stelae were made almost in the same time. It is certain that such a hairdo in the *Agrippina* fashion was preferred during the middle of the 1st century.²¹ The strict expression of the female portrait is given by the sharply compressed lips and two vertical wrinkles framing the big interesting eyes and marking the high and prominent cheeks. A careful analysis of the details helps the conclusion that the stone-mason dedicated most of his attention to the making of this figure thus creating a strong artistic impression. The other female figure has been less well preserved. The hair of *Rufellia Secunda* is damaged but we can suppose that it was similar to the first hairdo. The eyes are less recessed and the face is more round, details which mark its youth and give it freshness. The cheeks are fuller and the lips are more prominent and sensual. The ears and neck are adorned with not very marked jewelry. The clothes are standardized on all three figures. Everything has been subordinated to the figure of the deceased. The inscription was not carefully chiseled. The stele is dated to the middle of the 1st century.²²

6. In addition to described portraits we can mention the portraits of a man and wife on funeral ara in round frame (rotonda) from Val Sudiga near Galižana (fig. 2).²³ The wife has the similar hair-dressing as the girl with the necklace from Galižana. The hairstyle of the wife was in vogue from Tiberius to Nero, called the style of two *Agrippinas*²⁴. This one from rotonda can be dated to the time of Nero according the hairstyle of *Agrippina Minor*.²⁵
7. To the same group belongs the portrait of the woman in locket from Nesactium, accompanied by Cupids on each side (fig. 7), it was considered to be the portrait of deity *Eia* and dated in the half of the first century.²⁶ Today, there are some other opinions suggesting to date the timpanon of the tomb at the end of the second century even at the beginning of the third century²⁷ what is not acceptable for us.²⁸

Conclusion

We can see from all exposed that the imperial cult of *Julius* and *Claudius* family were very strong. It is visible in the influence *Agrippina the Younger* and the Elder had on the fashion of hair dressing. The hairdo was imitated by the inhabitants of cities, oriental like *Obelia Maxuma*, as well as the inhabitants of the ager like *Seia Maxuma* and *Rufellia Secunda* in whose case we point out that the influence was reversible and that the classical hairdo was added with rustic elements while preserving its basic characteristics²⁹ the same as the portrait in rotonda from Val Sudiga.

The official portrait of the empress was admired in a special room along the southeastern part of the forum in Pula and it is therefore not strange that the hairdo introduced by *Agrippina the Elder* and *Agrippina the Younger* spread so quickly and strongly on the South Istria.

Translation: Iva Štekar

19 Jurkić 1972, str. 368-369; Starac 2002, str. 37-39.

20 II., X/I, 689; Jurkić 1972, str. 364.

21 Sticotti 1908, str. 295; Jurkić 1972, str. 373; Bodon 1999, str. 88-89.

22 Starac 2002, str. 39.

23 Gnirs 1911, str. 41.

24 Starac 1995, str. 71.

25 Starac 2002, str. 39.

26 Jurkić 1996, str. 82.

27 Bodon 1999, str. 86.

28 Sticotti 1905, str. 203-211; Jurkić 1996, str. 83; Matijašić 1996a, str. 105-106.

29 Cambi 2000, str. 43.

Abbreviations

AMSI - Atti e memorie della Società istriana di archeologia e storia Patria, Parenzo – Venezia – Trieste

AP - Arheološki pregled, Arheološko društvo Jugoslavije, Beograd – Ljubljana

ASAnt - Annali del Seminario di Studi del Mondo Classico. Archeologia e Storia Antica, Istituto Universario Orientale, Napoli

Hanq - Histria antiqua. Međunarodni istraživački centar za arheologiju Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Pula

IHAD - Izdanja, Hrvatsko arheološko društvo, Zagreb

JÖAI - Jahreshefte der Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes, I-XXXI (1898-1939), Wien

JZ - Jadranski zbornik, Povijesno društvo Istre i Rijeke, Rijeka – Pula

OA - Opuscula archaeologica, Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Zagreb

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Sažetak

Agripinin portret u odnosu prema rimskim ženskim portretima s pulskog i nezakcijskog agera

Cljučne riječi: Klaudije, Neron, natpisi, Agrippina Minor, portret, funeralni spomenici

Za vrijeme zaštitnog arheološkog istraživanja (1987.-1988.) na forumu u Puli (*Colonia Pola*) otkrivena je mramorna ženska glava za koju se pretpostavlja da je portret Agripine Mlađe, žene cara Klaudija i majke cara Nerona. Skulptura je originalno vjerojatno bila postavljena na zidanoj bazi u sjeveroistočnom zidu luksuzne prostorije popločene mramorom i ukrašene štukaturama na zidu kojega je baza bila ukrašena mramorom i štukom. Tri natpisa otkrivena u blizini tzv. Agripinine kuće spominju careve Klaudija i Nerona. Prvi napis datira se u razdoblje od 37. do 41. g. i odnosi se na Klaudija kao konzula sufekta (*consul suffectus*); drugi natpis se datira u 45. g., kad je već na vlasti, a treći je posvećen caru Neronu kao adoptivnom sinu Klaudija, koji je već bio oženjen Agripinom Mlađom.

Budući su Agripina Mlađa kao i njezina majka Agripina Starija imale velik utjecaj na vlast, a posebno Mlađa na Klaudijevo političko djelovanje, njezini su portreti često inspirirali modu i ponašanje žena toga razdoblja, pa tako i umjetničku obradu njihovih likova na nadgrobnim spomenicima u Istri.

Na pulskom i nezakcijskom ageru nalazimo nekoliko ženskih likova s frizurama u stilu tzv. "dviju Agripina", posebno Agripine Mlađe. To su nadgrobnice stele Obelije Maksime, djevojke s perlama iz Galižane, mlađe žene s fragmentarne četvrtaste edikule iz Pule, obitelji Rufelija Rufa iz Malih Vareški kraj Nezakcija te portreta bračnog para u okruglim medaljonima iz Val Sudige kod Galežane i lika žene u lovorovom vijencu sa zabata iz Nezakcija. Svi ovi portreti nose na sebi biljeg mode i izraza sredine prvog stoljeća.