

FAUSTINA THE YOUNGER, ISIS, AND THE GRAIN TRADE IN STYBERRA

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Abstract

During the 2021 excavations carried out at the Agora, in the area of the Temple of Tyche, in Styberra by the National Institute and Museum Prilep a remarkable discovery of a portrait bust was made. The bust depicts Faustina Minor dressed in an Isis garment with the typical knot on her chest. The identification of this portrait is additionally confirmed by iconographical analysis and correlation to other material that connects Faustina, the new Augusta, to Isis Faria of Alexandria, patron and protectress of the fleet, ensuring safe trade and arrival of grain.

Prior studies show that Styberra reached its urban flourishing during the Antonine and Severan dynasties. It was an administrative centre of the Derriopos region, an important strategic zone and a supplier of grain for the Macedonian army, known from the historical sources. Other recent findings from the Agora such as the mensae ponderirae and an altar dedicated to Hermes provide more specific insights. Based on the available archaeological data this paper focuses further on the context of the erection of the Imperial bust and the purpose of the Agora building, as well as the importance of the grain trade in Styberra.

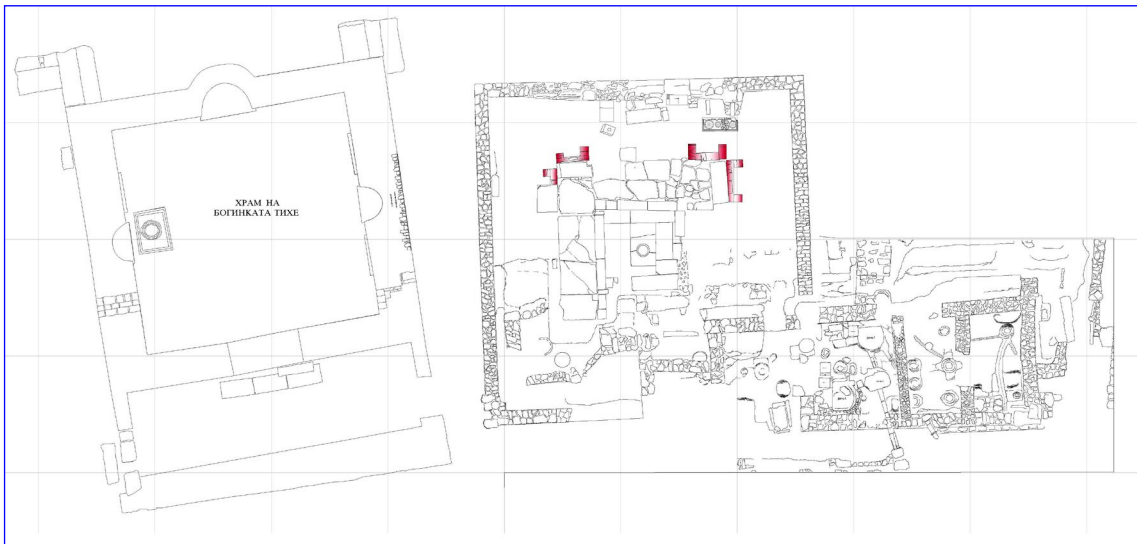
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From what is known from ancient sources, Styberra was a wealthy city, situated in the region of Derriopos in the Pelagonian Plain. It was founded in Hellenistic times, perhaps even earlier, and had become a thriving Macedonian polis during the Antonine and Severan dynasties when the city's economic fortunes were at their peak.¹ The city

¹ First mentioned by Polybius (*Historiae*, XXVIII, 8) and by Livy (*Ab urbe condita*, XXXI, 39; XLIII, 19–20) while referring to the times of the Macedonian wars. Styberra was of considerable importance during the Roman period and it is one of the towns on the river Erigon, as described by Strabo (VII, 327), who besides Styberra also mentions Brianion and Alkomene (See also *Geogr. Rav.*, IV, 9, 10–13).



Figs. 1, 2. Sector of the Temple of Tyche (photo courtesy of Prilep Museum)



Plan 1. Sector of the Temple of Tyche (plan by K. Jovanoski)

was the focus of a rich modern historiography. Starting from the early 19th century, a number of important researchers were interested in the ubication of the region and the historic importance of this ancient city.² What attracted them to a site near to the vil- lage of Čepigovo in the vicinity of Prilep was, above all, the numerous epigraphic finds, collected through the years, referring to ephebes, ephebarchs, and gymnasiarchs, pol- itarchs and macedoniarchs, thus illustrating significant social strata.³ The archaeolog- ical excavations conducted in 1953⁴ revealed most of the material including the honor- ary inscription made for Posidipos Thessalou from the council and people of the city, when the site was definitively proven to be Styberra.⁵ The areas of the city Gymnasion and the Temple of Tyche were brought to light, where an abundance of sculptural and even more epigraphical material was discovered and further analysed.⁶ Since then, the National Institute and Museum Prilep carried out many archaeological campaigns in the aforementioned areas, resulting in further discoveries, mainly of sculpture.⁷ The archaeological excavations in Styberra in the course of 2021, in the area next to the Temple of Tyche, revealed more of the importance of the city (Temelkoski and Jandre- ska 2022). A building positioned to the south of the temple was unearthed (figs. 1, 2,

2 To name just some of them: Leake 1841, 318–322; Hahn 1867, 225; Heuzey and Daumet 1876, 317; Demitsas 1896, 278–281; Kazarov 1921; Vulić 1931, 186–191; Papazoglou 1957, 216–221; Mikulčić 1996; Lilčić 2009, 125–147.

3 Papazoglou 1953, 1954, 1959.

4 Vučković-Todorović 1963.

5 Ποσιδίππον Θεσσαλου / ή Στυβερραίων βοθλή / και ό δήμος τόν πολείτην / άρετής" ενεκα (Vučković-Todorović 1963, 79, IV; IG 335')

6 Papazoglou 1988a, 295–304; Papazoglou 1988b; Kalpakoska 2004; Babamova 2005, 117–122, Temelko- ski, Jandreska and Babamova 2023.

7 Systematic archaeological excavations (1983–2011) were led by L. Kepeska and K. Kepeski (Kepeska and Kepeski 1990, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012), continued by the campaigns led by D. Temelkoski, focusing more on the south terrace of the Tyche temple (2014–2022).



Figs. 3, 4. Position of discovery of the sculpture (photo courtesy of Prilep Museum)

plan 1), which served as an administrative part of the Agora and which most probably had two phases, used in the 2nd and 3rd century AD. The 2021 excavations also brought to light valuable marble finds in the context of the Agora's second phase, found along the eastern wall - an exceptional Antonine female

portrait bust, an inscribed *mensae ponderirae*⁸ and an altar dedicated to Hermes, also with an inscription,⁹ among other finds, providing more specific insights.

The bust of Faustina Minor

The Antonine female bust was found face down, as it had fallen off the base from its original position at the Agora of Styberra (figs. 3, 4).¹⁰ It is an exceptional portrait of Faustina Minor, fortunately, excellently preserved, meticulously and skilfully executed (figs. 5–10).¹¹ Between the bust and the circular pedestal, there is a smaller quadrangular excised space where a metal plate with an inscription was probably once placed. Under the circular pedestal an iron peg joined the bust with a massive rectangular un-inscribed marble base.

Both the face and neck of the dignified portrait, with delicate and soft features, have been polished to a high gloss in contrast to the rich and heavy garment formed with deeper carvings. The neck is long and thin, the head slightly tilted to the left, with an elongated face and a small convex chin. This tendency of elongation emphasizes the

8 Temelkoski, Jandreska Kalpakoska 2021; and “Ετους ΘΠΣ´ Αίλιος Ὑμνος, ἀγορα/νομῶν, [ἀ]νέθηκεν ἐκ τ[ῶ]ν ἰδίων τὰ μέτρα, οἷς ἐ/χρητο ἡ πόλ[ις] In the year 289, Aelius Hymnos was even an agoranomist and at his own expense set up these standards by which the city was served (translation by V. Kalpakovska). I would like to thank P. Christodoulou for kindly checking the epigraphy.

9 Ἀγαθὴ τύχη / τὸν Ἑρμῆν / τῆ πατρίδι / Εὐπορος // Ἀλεξάνδρου.

10 See the chapter below.

11 Jandreska 2021, 48 cat. no. 112; Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. no. 8, 109–110 pls. XI–XIII.

elegance of the empress. Simple short carvings indicate the eyebrows which follow the outlines of the large almond-shaped eyes with emphasized lacrimal glands, eye bags, and deep irises, accentuating the serious yet mellow gaze upwards. The nose is long, somewhat pointed and thin, while the lips are shaped into a mild smile. Her delicate ears are decorated with discrete round earrings. The hair is wavy fashioned in a typical "Stirnwellenfrisur", parted in the middle with locks that frame the face. At the back,



Figs. 5–10. Bust of Faustina Minor, Styberra (photos by I. Blažev)

the hair is gathered at the nape into a bun with intertwined thick locks, made with tiny meticulous carvings that follow the waves along the face. The intertwined locks at the back follow the same pattern of execution. Below the bun, two tiny locks made in a shallow relief symmetrically fall over the neck.

Relying on the rich art legacy, the portraits of Faustina Minor can be chronologically more precisely interpreted, following the iconographical alterations usually marked by the birth of her children. The portrait style is of an elderly Faustina Minor, expressed with a dash of noble matronal seriousness achieved through the heavy, almost drowsy eyelids and equally heavy eyebrows with two subtle wrinkles. Characteristics of the portrait art of the Middle Antonine period are evident, i.e. the official royal dignity and the diffuse, somnolent sensuality. Based on the hairstyle and the typical facial expression, this portrait can be more precisely identified, especially considering Faustina's depictions on coins.¹² The hairstyle of this bust is recognizable among the portraits of Faustina the Younger of the 8th type, according to the classification of Fittschen, dated later than 162 AD, after the birth of her son M. Annius Verus, for which she was celebrated as *Fecunditas* on the mint series of the time.¹³ The front parted waves framing the face are closest to two portraits of Faustina the Younger from Rome, one from the Capitoline Museum (fig. 11) and the other from the Terme Museum (fig. 12), also comparable to the portraits from Copenhagen (fig. 13),¹⁴ and Syracuse.¹⁵ On the back on all of these portraits, the bun with intertwined locks is lowered towards the nape, however the Styberra portrait differs by omitting the typical braid. This particular hairstyle with slight differences continues to be used on the portraits of her daughter Lucilla (fig. 14).¹⁶

The Isiac garments of the empress are of particular interest to our study. Faustina wears a chiton and a heavy folded palla drawn over her shoulders, a portion thrown over the back. On the chest, the palla is tied in a typical knot of Isis ("Knotenpalla"). The chiton has a round neck opening, fastened with three buckles on the shoulders and along the arms, a typical detail seen in garments of female participants in rites taken from Hellenistic art, most common for the Canephora.¹⁷ The palla over the chest is tied into a knot that falls down into five thick and long folds in typical curved fringes.

Although Styberra had a highly productive local sculptural workshop,¹⁸ this newly found bust of Faustina Minor in the guise of Isis, based on the masterful production, can be assumed to be an import.¹⁹

12 Wegner 1939, 49–55 pl. 63; Frel and Morgan 1981, 75; Fittschen 1982, 60–63.

13 Fittschen 1982, 31, 60–63.

14 Fittschen 1982, no. 1 pl. 35/1–2; no. 3 pl. 36/1–2; no. 9 pl. 43/1–2.

15 Alexandridis 2004, cat. no. 208 pl. 43, 3.

16 Fittschen 1982, type 2, no. 1 pl. 48/1–2.

17 Jones Roccas 1995, 663 fig. 23; Bitrakova Grozdanova 2005, 295–301 figs. 6–11.

18 Kepeska and Kepeski 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012; Jandreska 2021; Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. nos. 6–11, 25–27, 31, 34, 35, 45–48, 61, 70–77, 98–102, 104; Nikoloska 2023.

19 The origin of the marble will be additionally confirmed by the forthcoming chemical analysis.



Fig. 11. Faustina Minor, Capitoline Museum, Rome (after Fittschen 1982, pl. 35, 1-2)



Fig. 12. Faustina Minor, Terme Museum, Rome (after Fittschen 1982, pl. 36, 1-2)



Fig. 13. Faustina Minor, Copenhagen (after Fittschen 1982, pl. 38, 1-2)

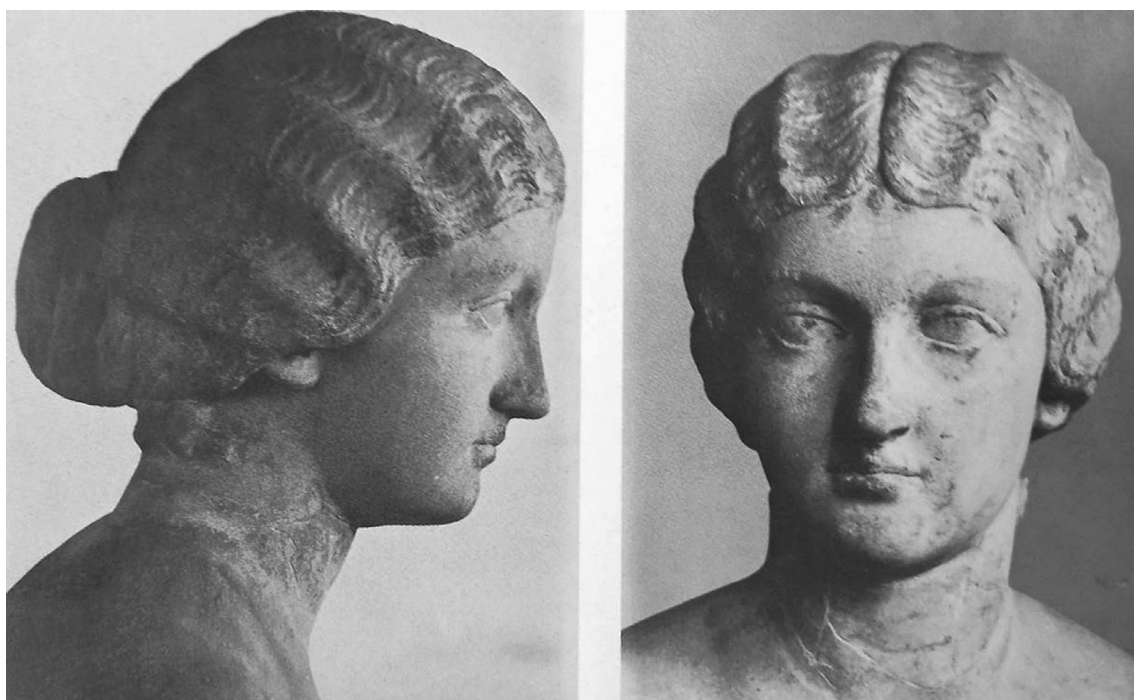


Fig. 14. Lucilla, Dresden (after Fittschen 1982, pl. 48, 1-2)

Faustina Minor and Isis

Portrayals of both Faustina the Elder and the Younger dressed in Isis garments are not unusual, however they are not common. The statue of Faustina the Elder from the Iseion at Cyrene is dressed in heavy draped Isis garments, with a long garland over her left shoulder.²⁰ Faustina the Younger from the Capitoline Museum in Rome (fig. 15), on the other hand, has a *basileion* on her head and holds a *sistrum*.²¹ There is also an interesting modern reconstruction of Isis as Faustina the Younger in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples.²² Of what can be found among the relatable material, the portrait of Faustina from Styberra is closest to the bust in Naples with unknown origin, of which only an entry and a drawing exist (fig. 16).²³ Both busts are wearing a *chiton* and a knotted fringed *palla* positioned symmetrically, dividing the dress. They both have elongated faces, even though the one from Naples has a slightly different hairstyle, with the braid wrapped around the head, an indication of an earlier type.

Representations of mortals with certain attributes of Isis are not uncommon; some are priestesses of the goddess, others are followers of the cult, sometimes even initiates. These last images, analyzed by Walters, Eingartner and lastly Bricault and Veymiers (2020), correspond to what Wrede (1981) called *Consecratio in formam deorum*. The numerous Attic funerary reliefs with depictions of women wearing the garment of Isis either impersonate the goddess, or represent priesthood or participation in a cult.²⁴ However, Faustina's portrait with the Isiac knot from Styberra probably does not belong to one of these categories. Here, we are dealing with an exceptional imperial portrait that allows us to view it differently. According to Walters, this manner of portraying in the guise of Isis is not to imply that an individual was depicted as impersonating Isis, in which case she would have been wearing the emblem of the goddess on her head, but rather as someone initiated into the cult, wearing a fringed mantle with an Isis knot without any other attributes.²⁵

More insightful explanations of the Isiac context of Faustina the Younger are to be found in epigraphy. We know of an inscription from Alexandria dated between 147 and 169 from members of an association in charge of effigies of Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus and Faustina who is named Pharia, Sosistolos, the New Augusta in honour of a certain P. Aelius Panopaios.²⁶ Faustina was honourably named Pharia and Sosistolos, or the Saviour of the Fleet, an *epiclesis* usually given to Isis since the 1st century BC, attested abundantly in literary and epigraphic sources, as well as in numismatics, as Bricault has elaborated in his study.²⁷ The empress even had her own priest at Oxyrhynchus.²⁸ As such, Faustina Minor in the guise of Isis imperson-

20 Rosenbaum 1960, 62 no. 61 pls. 40, 1–2; 76, 1.

21 Walters 1988, 80 pl. 31, a–b.

22 Rosso 2018, 539 fig. 18.1.

23 Eingartner 1991, 88 no. 154 pl. XCVII.

24 Dunand 1973a, 148–149; Walters 1988, 52–57; Rosso 2018, 540–541; Bricault and Veymiers 2020.

25 Walters 1988, 79 n. 78.

26 *BCH* 118 (1994) 511; *SEG* XLIV 1994 (1997) no. 1442; Bernand and Bernand 1998.

27 Bricault 2000; Bricault 2020, 124.

28 *P.Oxy.* 3, 502, l. 4; See also Levick 2014, 133–137.



Fig. 15. Faustina Minor as Isis (after Walters 1988, 80, pl. 31, a–b)



Fig. 16. Faustina Minor, Naples (after Eingartner 1991, no. 154 pl. XCVII)

ated the *Annona* and became a patroness of the fleet that transported grains from Alexandria to Italy.

Complementary to the iconographical changes seen among the sculpture in the round, there are the portraits on the mint issues, where we discover more information. Many coins were issued in the name of the empress with Isiac themes, outnumbering those of her husband and her father. There are at least four series from a mint in Alexandria with sailing Isis on the reverse. There is also a medallion from Rome with the portrait of Faustina on the obverse, and on the reverse an Isis sailing on a ship, in front of the Lighthouse of Alexandria.²⁹ Examples of Faustina the Younger identified with Isis are known on coins from Amastris in Paphlagonia³⁰ and from Lystra in Lycaonia.³¹

29 Rickman 1980, 265; Bricault 2000, 147; Bricault 2020, 96–97 fig. 70.

30 Dunand 1973b, 113; Mikocki 1995, 64 cat. no. 376 pl. XV; Rosso 2018, 553 fig. 18.9; Bricault 2020, 75 tab. 11, 87 tab. 20; <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/35523>. Both Dunand and Mikocki observed that at Amastris the cult of Isis had an official character and Faustina was personally engaged in it. This, however, is not supported by documentation.

31 Dunand 1973b, 2, 26; Mikocki 1995, 64 cat. no. 377. According to Dunand the members of the imperial family played a role in the diffusion of Egyptian cults in Lystra which, again, is not sufficiently documented.

The Agora of Styberra, grain trade, and the Antonines

Based on what we can reconstruct from the context of the discovery, the sculpture of Faustina Minor was placed in a niche in the eastern wall of the Agora of Styberra (fig. 17), formed by columns of building ceramic bricks and richly decorated with vegetal wall-painting ornamentation (fig. 18). In another niche stood the aforementioned sacrificial altar dedicated to Hermes placed on a pedestal with an inscription. Yet another find further explains the purpose of the building – the inscribed measuring table, *mensa ponderaria*, with eight round receptacles of different diameters and depths carved on the upper surface with an engraved profiled frame (fig. 19). The inscription on the front reveals a certain *agoranom* named Aelius Hymnos as a donator. Since we are dealing with the administrative building of the city Agora, where obviously market activities also took place, the position of the statue is more logical and can be ascribed greater significance. The presence of a bust of the wife of the emperor Marcus Aurelius in the administrative building of the Agora, associated with her important role as a patroness of the *Annona* reveals more about the history and the economy of the city.

Styberra was an important strategic zone during times of war as known from Polybius and Livy. The reason for this, among other things, was the importance of the city in the grain trade. The greater area of Pelagonia is abundant with grain, as is known also for the modern period. Specific historical events related to the grain trade of the city of Styberra are mentioned in the writings of Livy (Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, XXXI. 39; XLIII. 18). During the Second Macedonian – Roman War Styberra was one of the cities where the Roman army was supplied with grain. In 200 BC, while retreating from the area of Lynx, the army under the leadership of the consul Sulpicius stocked up on grain in Styberra.³² Later on, during the Third Macedonian – Roman War, Styberra became one of the main bases for the military defence of Macedonia in this narrower geographical area, and before attacking the Illyrians – allies of the Romans – king Perseus supplied his army with grain.³³ This must have elevated Styberra, the largest city of the Derriope region, as a commercial and administrative centre in the following Roman imperial period.³⁴ Styberra continued to have primacy as one of the centres for

32 *Corpus iam curabat consul cum uenisse caduceatorem et quid uenisset nuntiatum est. responso tantum dato mane postero die fore copiam conueniendi, id quod quaesitum erat, nox dieique insequentis pars ad praeciendum iter Philippo data est. montes quam uiam non ingressurum graui agmine Romanum sciebat petit. consul prima luce caduceatore datis indutiis dimisso haud ita multo post abisse hostem cum sensisset, ignarus qua sequeretur, iisdem stauis frumentando dies aliquot consumpsit. Stuberram deinde petit atque ex Pelagonia frumentum quod in agris erat conuexit....* (Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, XXXI, 39)

33 *Perseus principio hiemis egredi Macedoniae finibus non ausus, ne qua in regnum uacuum inrumperent Romani, sub tempus brumae, cum inexistens ab Thessalia montes niuis altitudo facit, occasionem esse ratus frangendi finitimum spes animosque, ne quid auerso se in Romanum bellum periculi ab iis esset, cum a Thracia pacem Cotys, ab Epiro Cephalus repentina defectione ab Romanis praestarent, Dardanos recens domisset bellum, solum infestum esse Macedoniae latus, quod ab Illyrico pateret, cernens, neque ipsis quietis Illyriis et aditum praebentibus Romano, si domisset proximos Illyriorum, Gentium quoque regem iam diu dubium in societatem perlici posse, cum decem milibus peditum, quorum pars phalangitae erant, et duobus milibus leuium armorum et quingentis equitibus profectus Stuberram uenit. Inde frumento conplurium dierum sumpto iussoque apparatu oppugnandarum urbium sequi, tertio die ad Uscanam—Pentestianae terrae ea maxima urbs est—posuit castra, prius tamen, quam uim admoueret, missis, qui temptarent nunc praefectorum praesidii, nunc oppidanorum animos.* (Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, XLIII, 18)

34 For more detailed historical analysis see Papazoglou 1954; 1957, 217–218; 1959.



Fig. 17. Reconstruction of the eastern wall of the agora of Styberra (plan by K. Jovanoski)

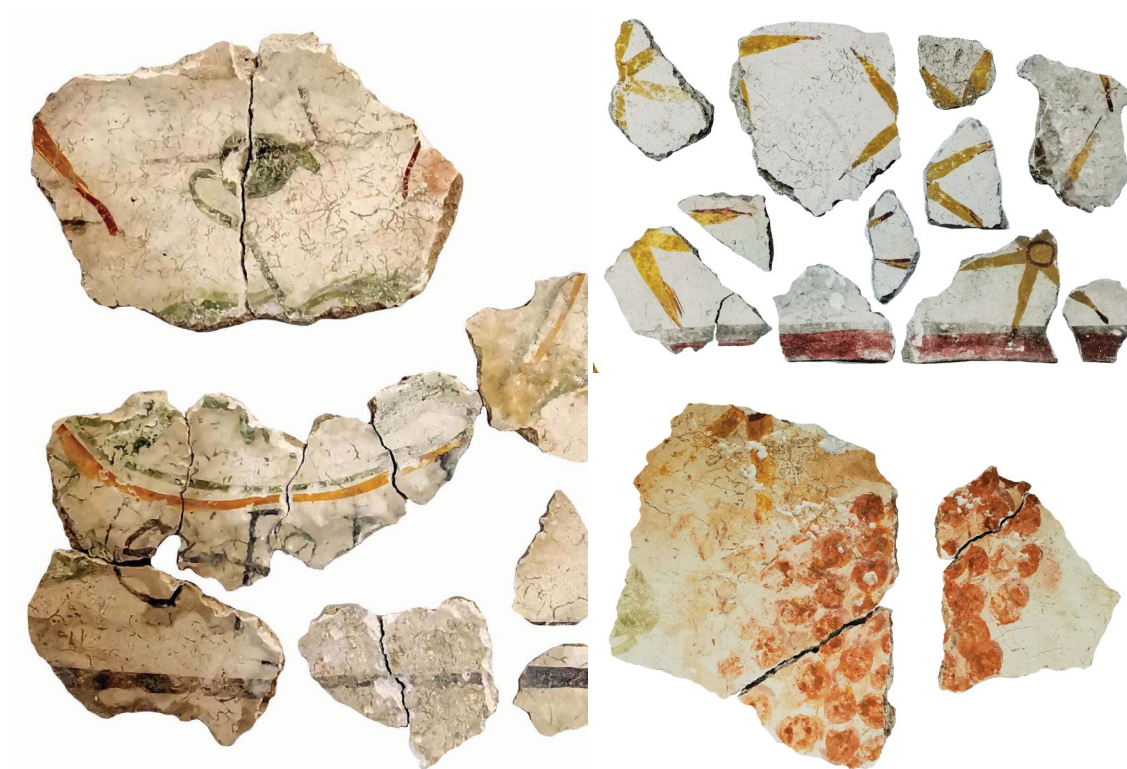


Fig. 18a–c. Fresco decoration of the niche (photo courtesy of Prilep Museum)

trade, i.e. grain supply, reaching its zenith during the Antonine and Severan dynasties. This wealth is additionally evident in the rich sculptural material of honorary statues.³⁵

A bust of Faustina Minor of such grandeur to be positioned in an Agora of the provincial city of Styberra speaks of its regional importance with regard to the *Annona*. At first glance, Faustina in the guise of Isis has been symbolically erected in a niche at the market place as protectoress of the regional grain trade, but the message was probably more specific than that, involving trade regulations and imperial political demands of the Antonines. The assumption is that the grain production and distribution from

³⁵ Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. nos. 45–48, 70–77, 104 pls. XLIII–XLVI, LIX–LXIII.



Fig. 19. The altar dedicated to Hermes and the mensa ponderaria (photo courtesy of Prilep Museum)

Styberra was at a greater scale than just supplying the region. This was especially important during the Antonine plague,³⁶ which is recorded as ravaging the province.³⁷ The grain supply in Rome in the mid-2nd century was of utmost importance.³⁸ According to *Vita Marci Antonini Philosophi*, "During times of famine he (Marcus Aurelius) provided Italian communities with food from the city and carefully administered the whole matter of the grain supply (11.3), ... and provision of the grain supply was a top priority (11.5)."³⁹

Further Antonine involvement in the region is additionally to be considered, via the analysis of other imperial statuary. The female portrait from Macedonia from a non-confirmed find spot, now in the Museum of Ljubljana (fig. 20),⁴⁰ may be addressed here, not only because of the dynastic relations with Faustina Minor, but also considering the portrait style between both depicted persons. The portrait was made by a skilful master who managed to convey the elegance and nobility of the young woman, obviously a product of a leading workshop. It is a typical portrait of the Middle / Late Antonine period and resembles Faustina the Younger of type 8, primarily based on the hairstyle.⁴¹ However, the closest analogy is the bronze portrait of a girl from Asia Minor, most probably from Lycia, now in the Art Museum in Worcester, Massachusetts, dated to the Late Antonine period.⁴² The Worcester portrait depicts Crispina, which is a

36 Gilliam 1961; Silver 2012.

37 Wiseman 1973.

38 Rickman 1980, 196.

39 After Adams 2013, 90–91, 143 n. 356, 276–277.

40 Kastelic 1953, 29–35 fig. 1, 2; Rüsche 1969, 114, P9; Sokolovska 1987, 115 no. 28, T. 16/1; Mikulčić 1996, fig. 13; Cambi et al. 1988, 217 no. 261; Cambi et al. 1989, no. 140; Osvald 2005; Istenič 2015, 95 fig. 104; Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. no. 9 pls. XIV–XV.

41 Fittschen 1982, 60–63.

42 Inan and Alföldi-Rosenbaum 1979, no. 339 pls. 247, 248, Vermeule 1981, no. 289 pl. 26.

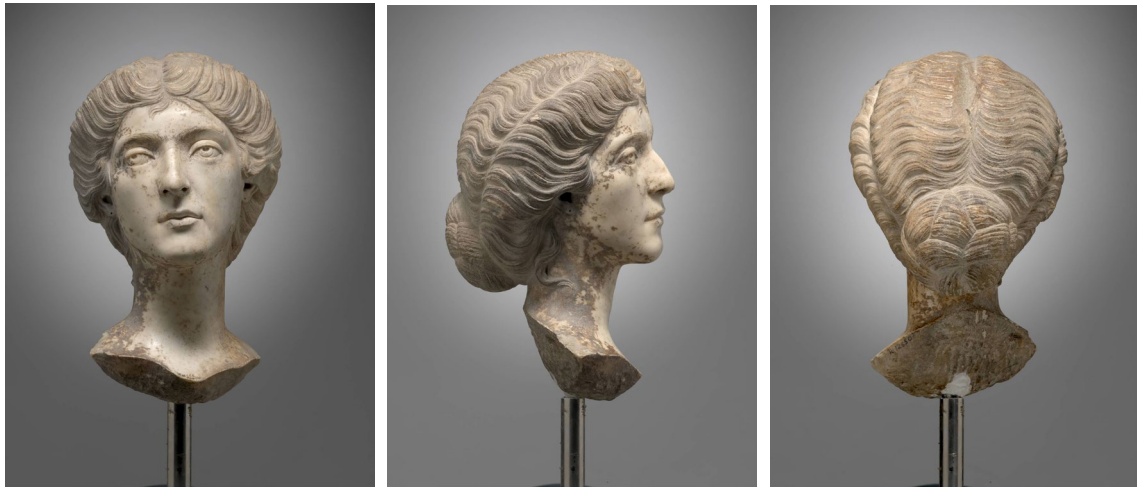


Fig. 20a–c. Crispina (photo courtesy of Ljubljana Museum)

more likely identification of the portrait from Macedonia, as recent studies suggest.⁴³ During the reign of Commodus, when much attention continued to be given to the importance of the grain supply to Rome, the usual *Ceres* coins were issued with Crispina on the obverse, evoking the *Annona*.⁴⁴ This could be viewed as a logical continuation of honoring Faustina by erecting a statue of her daughter in the Agora of Styberra. Not only is it quite probable these two statues originated from the same manufacturing centre, it is also conceivable that they were exhibited in the same place in the Agora of Styberra.⁴⁵

The vicinity of the temple of Tyche in Styberra to the administrative building of the city Agora should also not be ignored. The temple is evidently an older one, restored in 126/7 by the vow of Anthestia Fusca that lists names of her heirs.⁴⁶ Based on what we can reconstruct of the renovated structure, it was prostyle, with a stylobate supporting four probably Ionic columns, since fragments of such columns were found in the 1953 excavations. The predecessors Titus Flavius Orestes and his son Philonexus erected a statue of Anthestia Fusca, which has unfortunately never been found. Busts of the heirs Orestes⁴⁷ and Filoxenes⁴⁸ were also erected in the temple and were discovered

43 Istenič 2015; Osvald 2005.

44 Rickman 1980, 266.

45 This idea was already proposed by Mikulčić 1996. It must be noted that this is just a theory until, and if, we find further information about the exact location in Macedonia where this portrait originated.

46 Vučković-Todorović 1963, 83; Papazoglou 1988; *IG* 336; Kalpakoska 2004, 25, 2.1.1; Babamova 2005, no. 55; The testament of Anthestia Fusca confirms the existence of an earlier sanctuary of Tyche in Styberra, dating to before the restoration that took place according to the vow of Orestes and Filoxenes; this was most likely built in the mid–1st century at the earliest, following the flourishing beginnings of the city and in accordance with the epigraphic records of the ephebaic community.

47 Vučković-Todorović 1963, 83, T. 21, 35, 36; Rüsç 1969, 117, P15; Sokolovska 1987, 113 no. 26, T. 13/1, T. 14/1; Jevtović (ed.) 1987, no. 116; Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. no. 7 pls. VIII–X.

48 Vučković-Todorović 1963, 83, T. 22; Rüsç 1969, 116, P14; Sokolovska 1987, 110 no. 21, T. 10/1, T. 11/1; Kalpakoska 2004, 25, 2.1.1; Jevtović (ed.) 1987, no. 115; Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. no. 6 pls. VI, VII.

in the campaign of the same year; the busts are very well executed, with carefully rendered details of the hair and the beard, and are highly polished, clearly works of master artists. Such portraits, commissioned by local citizens and erected in a restored temple, speak of their wealth and supposed important political engagement forty years prior to the erection of the bust of Faustina. The Imperial cult is confirmed in Styberra by the mid-2nd century,⁴⁹ and a further Severan presence is sculpturally attested by several female portraits.⁵⁰ Later on, a portrait of the emperor Trebonianus Gallus was erected in the Tyche temple,⁵¹ demonstrating continuing imperial control over the city in the mid-3rd century. On the other hand, the Isiac cults are not attested in Styberra as in other regional centres such as Stobi.⁵²

Conclusions

The image of Faustina Minor in Isis garments was evidently a powerful personification of the *Annona* or the grain production and distribution in the middle of the 2nd century. Her bust was erected in a niche in the eastern wall of the Agora of Styberra, a city that was considered an important regional trading centre for grain, presumably even more so in times of famine and epidemic, and an increased need for grain supply during the mid-2nd century and even beyond. Based both on the masterful execution and the political message it carried, this fine sculpture was, most likely, a product of a workshop from Rome, imported here to serve as a direct messenger of an imperial order. Such an exceptional portrait of Faustina, erected in a provincial yet wealthy city, surely had to do with more than just a sign of Imperial favour for local loyalty and appreciation for carrying out the Imperial cult. Not only the iconographical allusion of Faustina as the *Annona*, but also the tradition of Styberra as the grain trade centre of Pelagonia, taking into account the latest material from the recently excavated Agora that has illustrated more directly the everyday trade life of the city, leads us to assume a more concrete political statement by the erection of this bust. A portrait of an emperor's wife, an epitome of fertility, initiated in the Isiac cults at Alexandria, was placed at a significant trade point so that the *Annona* officials could deal more efficiently, under imperial protection, with the regulations of the regional grain production and distribution in critical times of food shortage.

The epiclesis *Pharia*, reflected in the Isis garment, has maritime meaning above all, regulating the grain trade by sea. Considering that it was important to transport grain by water wherever possible,⁵³ and its trade was especially managed and monitored in Antonine times, provides an opportunity for an additional interpretation. It could be that

49 Kepeska and Kepeski 2011; Kalpakovska and Jandreska 2020.

50 Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. nos. 25–27 pls. XXVI, XXVII.

51 Vučković-Todorović 1963, 84, T. 25, 42; Rüşch 1969, 118, P16 figs. 6, 7; Bergmann 1977, pl. 48, 1, 2; Sokolovska 1987, 125 no. 43, T. 22/1, Jevtović 1987, no. 194; Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. no. 35 pl. XXXV.

52 For the temple in Stobi see Blaževska and Radnjanski 2015; Several marble statues and bronze figurines were found in private contexts in the vicinity of Styberra (Bitrakova Grozdanova 1999, 56–97; Bitrakova Grozdanova 2015, 41–47; Nikoloska 2015, 260–262).

53 Rickman 1980, 120.

Styberra was connected to a branch of the land trade route of the Empire that led to the nearest port that the city traded from, probably the port of Dyrrachion, the closest one to Styberra, as the city was located on the side routes of Via Egnatia.⁵⁴ The grain produced here might have supplied important cities of the Empire, if not Rome itself, and might have been stored in the large granaries in Ostia. This supposedly successful trade is probably the reason for the city's flourishing economics during Antonine and later Severan times. The bust of Faustina stood at the city Agora as an expression of the Imperial intervention and supervision of the local grain market, but also as a warning for the locals to be wary and follow the price regulations coordinated during the period of Antonine famine. It may therefore be viewed as an imperially-controlled fair trade management of the local grain business in times of need, "supervised" by the revered Faustina, the New Augusta, with her illustrious watchful eye over the transactions carried out at the Agora of Styberra.

54 Via Egnatia was significant for the insemination of the cult of Isis through the Province of Macedonia. See Nikoloska 2019. However, the erection of the Faustina bust has little to do with the worship of the cult in Styberra, which has not been confirmed to date.

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