

TORSO OF DIONYSUS

ROMAN, 1ST-2ND CENTURY AD

MARBLE

SMALL RESTORATIONS

HEIGHT: 94 CM.

WIDTH: 40 CM.

DEPTH: 28 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*FORMERLY IN THE COLLECTION OF
BARON LÉON DE SOMZÉE (1837-1901),
FROM AT LEAST 1897.*

*SOLD BY J. FIEVEZ, COLLECTIONS DE
SOMZÉE ("SOMZÉE COLLECTIONS"), 24
MAY 1904, BRUSSELS, LOT NO. 23.*

*SOLD BY J. FIEVEZ, COLLECTION DE
MRS. DE SOMZÉE ("COLLECTION OF
MRS DE SOMZÉE"), 27-29 MAY 1907,
BRUSSELS, LOT NO. 278.*

*THEN IN A PARISIAN PRIVATE
COLLECTION AT 102 RUE DE LA TOUR,
16TH ARRONDISSEMENT, PARIS.*

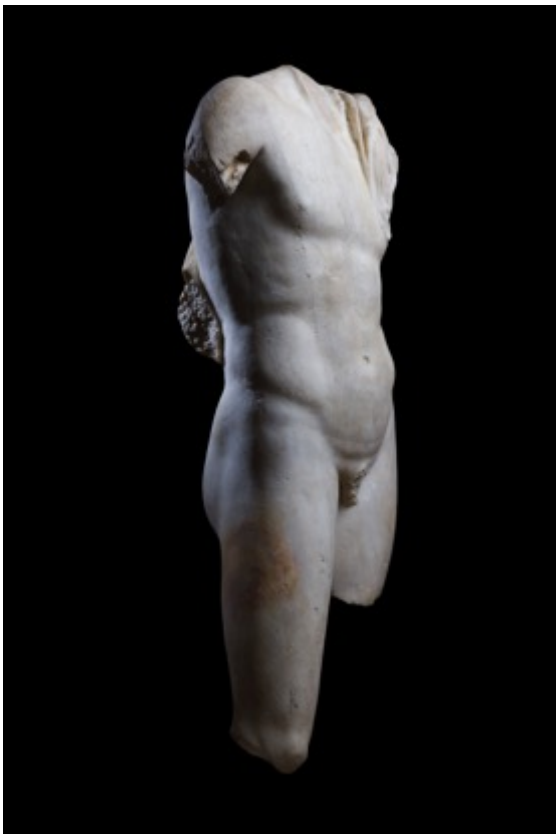


This elegant white marble sculpture represents a young man in heroic nudity. His torso is slender, his thighs slim and extended and his muscles slightly prominent. Unlike the torsos of men with pronounced muscles, our torso displays delicately sculpted abdominal lines, which give an impression of youth. He is wearing a fold of his chlamys over his left shoulder and down his back. Part of the garment would probably have been wrapped around his right arm. The drapery is lined with relatively deep folds, giving an illusion of thickness and matter, a testament to the sculptor's technical prowess.

The young man is standing in the position known as '*contrapposto*'. The weight of his body is supported by his left leg, while the right is slightly flexed, creating a particular sway of the hips. The inclined line of the hips is balanced out by the line of the shoulders, which gives the body an 'S' shape and creates a certain impression of movement. This position was invented by the Greek sculptor Polyclitus in the 5th century BC. His sculptures that best display this position are the "Diadumenos" ("Man Tying on a Fillet") and "Doryphoros" ("Spear Bearer" - Ill. 1). *Contrapposto* is thus the result of his research into the ideal proportions of the human body. It marked the transition between the very rigid archaic sculpture and classical sculpture. This



position was widely taken up over the following centuries by Greek and then Roman sculptors to represent heroes, deities, emperors and dignitaries. In this kind of iconography, the balance of the sculpture is ensured by another feature, generally a tree trunk, positioned to the side, as shown by the fixture marks that are still visible on the right leg.



Although there are no identifying attributes, our sculpture probably represents Dionysus, or Bacchus for the Romans. According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Dionysus was the son of Zeus and the mortal Semele. When Semele was pregnant, Zeus promised her he would grant her anything she desired. The jealous Hera prompted Semele to ask the god to reveal himself in all his divinity. The potent vision of Zeus killed her instantly. Zeus managed to save the child and hide him in

his thigh until his birth. The newborn was then entrusted to the nymphs of the region of Nysa, who brought him up. As the god of vines, he was associated with luxuriant vegetation, regeneration, and wine and its excesses. Dionysus is a deity with two faces, one benevolent and pleasant and the other brutal and wild. According to legend, he brought alcohol and its ambivalent effects to the various lands of the Empire with his suite of maenads and satyrs.



The particular position of the drapery used in our sculpture of Dionysus mirrors that of a statuette of the god conserved at the Antikensammlung museum in Berlin (Ill. 2). As for our torso, the god is represented in the *contrapposto* position with a drapery over his left shoulder, falling diagonally across his back, then twining around his right arm. This characteristic position of the drapery is the same in two

other sculptures representing Dionysus, conserved at the Vatican museums (Ill. 3-4).



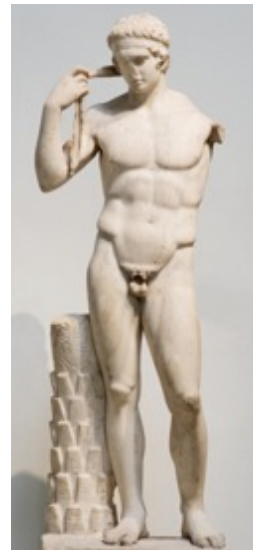
Our male torso belonged to Baron Léon de Somzée (1837-1901), a Belgian businessman specialising in gas exploitation (Ill. 5). A major art enthusiast, throughout his life, he acquired numerous sculptures during his journeys in Italy and regularly lent his works to institutions for temporary exhibitions. Our torso was listed by Furtwängler in his inventory of Somzée's collection in 1897 (Ill. 6). Upon his death, our torso was first put up for sale in 1904 (Ill. 7). This sale, organised by the auctioneer Mr Fievez, in concert with Somzée's heirs, included the baron's entire collection. On that occasion, a vast part went to the collections owned by Belgium, while other works were disseminated throughout the rest of the world. There was a second sale of his wife's collection upon

her death in 1907, when our torso was sold as lot no. 278 (Ill. 8). Finally, our torso was catalogued by Salomon Reinach in 1909 (Ill. 9).

Publications:

- A. Furtwängler, *Collection Somzée : Monuments d'art antique* ("Somzée Collection: Monuments of Antique Art"), Bruckmann, Munich, 1897, p. 18, no. 23, Plate XV.
- S. Reinach, *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine* ("Catalogue of Greek and Roman Statuary"), Ernest Leroux, Paris, 1909, Book II, Vol. 2, p. 818, no. 7.

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. "Diadumenos", 1st century AD, marble, H.: 145 cm. British Museum, London, inv. no. GR 1864.10-21.4.



Ill. 2. Statuette of Dionysus, 2nd century BC, marble, H.: 75.5 cm. Antikensammlung museum, Berlin, inv. no. Sk1532.



Ill. 3. Statue of Dionysus, 1st century AD, marble, H.: 144 cm. Vatican museums, Galleria Chiaramonti, inv. no. 1934.



Ill. 4. Statue of Dionysus, Roman, Antonine period, marble, H.: 79 cm. Vatican museums, Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. no. 10402.

Provenance:



Ill. 5. Léon de Somzée (1837-1901).



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-A. Furtwängler, *Collection Somzée : Monuments d'art antique* ("Somzée Collection: Monuments of Antique Art"), Bruckmann, Munich, 1897, p. 18, no. 23, Plate XV.



23. Knabentorso mit Gewand.

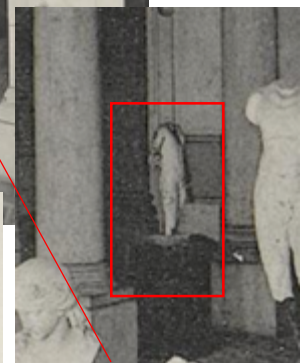
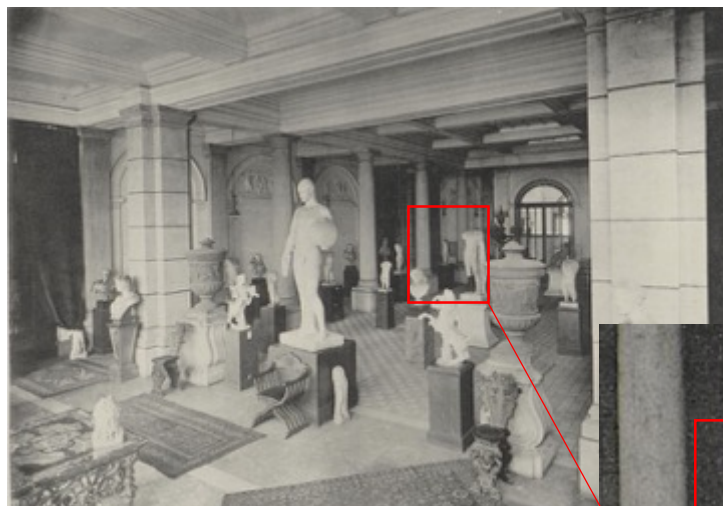
Tafel XV.

Weisser Marmor. Frühere Ergänzungen abgenommen. Von der Halsgrube zum Ansatz des Gliedes 0,443; Entfernung der Brustwarzen 0,217.

Ein Knabe von zarten Formen steht auf dem linken Fusse und stützt sich mit dem rechten Unterarm auf einen verloren gegangenen Gegenstand, einen Pfeiler oder Baumstamm, der durch eine grosse Stütze mit dem rechten Oberschenkel verbunden war, an dessen Aussenseite noch eine grosse, jetzt mit Gips verschmierte Spur davon zeugt. Der linke Oberarm ist gesenkt. Am linken Unterbein ist der Rest einer schmalen Stütze. Der Kopf war nach seiner Rechten gewendet. Ein schmales Gewandstück liegt auf der linken Schulter auf und fiel über den rechten Unterarm.

Der Torso ist vortrefflich gearbeitet. Der zart durchschimmernde Brustkorbrand, der weiche Bauch, der Schambügel, die feinen Kniee, all dies ist vortrefflich und ganz im Geiste praxitelischer Kunst. Der Torso geht auf eine Statue der Richtung des Praxiteles zurück; nächst verwandt in Motiv und Stil ist der folgende Tors, der aber etwas mehr noch den älteren Traditionen folgt und die Teile noch etwas härter absetzt und weniger ründliche Übergänge, sondern flächigere Behandlung zeigt.

-Sale by J. Fievez, *Collections de Somzée* ("Somzée Collections"), 24 May 1904, Brussels, lot no. 23.



23 — Torse drapé d'un jeune garçon. Marbre blanc. Une draperie part du sein gauche, passe sur l'épaule gauche abaissée, et revient par derrière, reposer sur le bras droit dégagé qui est conservé jusqu'au coude, ainsi qu'un fragment de l'humérus gauche et les jambes jusque sous les genoux. Le corps repose sur la jambe gauche en évasant fortement la hanche. Il prenait contact avec un appui à droite, comme l'atteste la large marque que la cuisse a conservée de ce côté, et qui est actuellement réparée avec du plâtre. La jambe gauche porte le reste d'un tenon.

Cette fine sculpture remonte à un original qui relève de la tradition de Praxitèle. — Voir Furtwängler, *Collection Somzée*, pl. 23.

Haut. 0,94.

-Sale by J. Fievez, *Collection de Mrs de Somzée* ("Mrs de Somzée's Collection"), 27-29 May 1907, lot no. 278.



278 — **Torse drapé d'un jeune garçon.** Marbre blanc. Une draperie part du sein gauche, passe sur l'épaule gauche abaissée, et revient par derrière, reposer sur le bras droit dégage qui est conservé jusqu'au coude, ainsi qu'un fragment de l'humérus gauche et les jambes jusque sous les genoux. Le corps repose sur la jambe gauche en évasant fortement la hanche. Il prenait contact, avec un appui à droite, comme l'atteste la large marque que la cuisse a conservée de ce côté, et qui est actuellement réparée avec du plâtre. La jambe gauche porte le reste d'un tenon.

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