

TORSO OF DIONYSUS

ROMAN, 2ND CENTURY AD

MARBLE

RESTORATIONS FROM THE 18TH - 19TH CENTURY

HEIGHT: 67 CM.

WIDTH: 55 CM.

DEPTH: 29 CM.

PROVENANCE:

IN A EUROPEAN PRIVATE COLLECTION SINCE THE 18TH - 19TH CENTURY, BASED ON THE RESTORATION TECHNIQUES. MENTIONED AS BELONGING TO THE COLLECTION OF THE SCULPTOR FRANCESCO DE SANCTIS, ITALY. THEN BELLONI COLLECTION, ITALY. IN THE PARISIAN COLLECTION OF ALEXANDRE IOLAS (1908-1987), ACQUIRED FROM GALERIE URAEUS, PARIS, IN THE 1960S. THEN IN THE PARISIAN PRIVATE COLLECTION OF ANDRÉ MOURGUES, GIFTED TO HIM BY THE PREVIOUS OWNER.



This very lovely marble torso belongs to a young man with an athletic physique. It

represents Dionysus, in the flower of his youth. His pose is dynamic, his bust leaning towards the right. His muscles are showcased through the prominent obliques, lightly pronounced abdominals and salient yet discreet pectorals. In the middle of his abdomen, quite a deeply carved navel is represented in a very lifelike manner. His back also looks athletic, mainly due to the dynamic curve of the very pronounced and incredibly realistic line of his spine. Despite his noticeable muscles, our torso is unquestionably that of a young man. While his muscles are subtly accentuated, they are not as defined as those that can be observed in portrayals of adult men. Additionally, his bust is quite thin, his pelvis slim and his shoulders narrow.

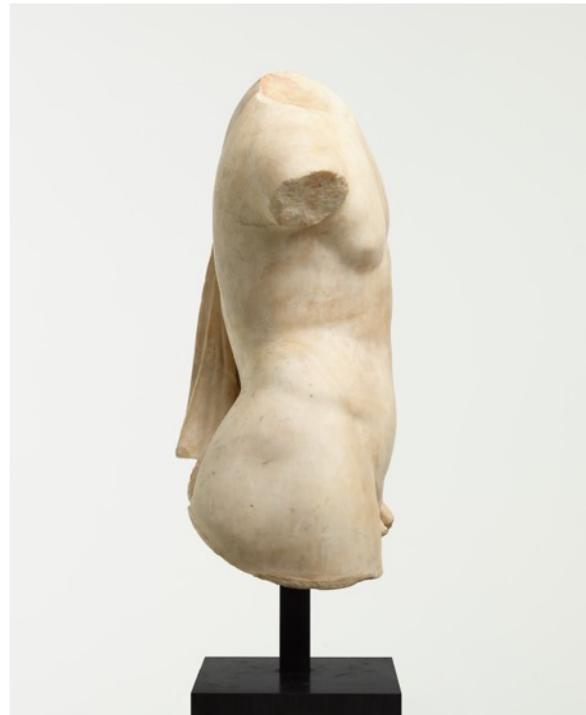
Given the position of his hips, his legs were likely close together, in a posture that, while static, is still far from the hieraticism that was predominant in Greece in the archaic period. His right arm seems to be held away from his body, from the position of the shoulder. His left arm, however, lies along his torso, covered by a drapery at the fold of the elbow. The thick cloth continues down his back in large folds and covers his left buttock, while the right is left bare. The fabric is also represented very realistically through thick-looking folds, the illusion of which was created by deeply carving the marble, further producing a lovely play of light and shadow. The voluminous drapery contrasts with the



very smooth, almost polished, torso, which enabled the sculptor to amply display their mastery. Their artistic genius can also be seen in the representation of the skin, very sensual and strikingly lifelike.



The slightly inclined position of our young figure is reminiscent of *contrapposto*, the posture established and enshrined in a theory by the Greek sculptor Polykleitos in the 5th century BC. The weight shift inherent in *contrapposto* is created through a specific position in which all of the body's weight rests on one supporting leg, represented extended, while the other, slightly bent, is left free. The unequal distribution of weight creates a tilt of the pelvis, which leads to a tilt of the line of the shoulders in the opposite direction. *Contrapposto* thus gives sculptures the illusion of movement. We note that this weighting principle was observed by the sculptor: the right hip is higher than the left, while the left shoulder is higher than the right.



The representation and promotion of the masculine body held an important place in the Graeco-Roman aesthetic, particularly through sculptures depicting young men. In the case of our work, identification is fairly straightforward. The fabric over his arm hints at the identity of the figure represented. It is likely a depiction of the young Dionysus. An emblematic deity in Greek mythology, he was the son of Zeus and the mortal Semele. Targeted by the jealous Hera, wife of the king of the gods, Semele was assassinated while still pregnant with the young Dionysus. Zeus was able to save his son by taking him out of his mother's stomach and sewing him into his own thigh, thereby carrying him to full term. Once Dionysus was born, Hermes entrusted the bacchantes and maenads with bringing him up. Known to the Romans as Bacchus, Dionysus was one of the best-known deities in antiquity. The god of wine and the vine, drunkenness, excess and the wilderness, he was widely represented surrounded by companions

making up his famous retinue, which included wild animals such as panthers and leopards. We know of a great many representations of the god, including some examples that closely resemble our torso (ill. 1-6).



Moreover, a drawing by the archaeologist Salomon Reinach (ill. 7), identified as a Bacchus that he saw in a collection in Rome while visiting the city, is consistent with our torso in every way. It shows a young god with an athletic physique resting his weight on his extended right leg, right arm folded, his hand grasping a lock of hair falling from his bun, his head crowned with vegetation and his body partly hidden by a drapery that rests across the crook of his left elbow. In the same drawing, two locks of hair seem to escape his bun, falling one on either side of his neck, exactly as in the Berlin example (ill. 8). The god grasps the right lock, while the left falls along his collarbone. A restoration mark can be seen on the left collarbone of our torso – it

could actually show where that lock once lay. An attentive observation of the drawing reveals dotted lines that correspond exactly to the breaks and restorations of our torso, indicating that our magnificent torso of Dionysus and the sculpture in the drawing are unquestionably one and the same.

The harmonious proportions of this superb sculpture are enhanced by the use of marble, the quintessential material of antiquity, which, through its hardness, makes the figure's anatomy appear very lifelike, and, through its polish, extremely refined. Some traces of tools and concretions are also visible on the rock, showing the passing of time. They are an integral part of the work's history and the way it made its way to us. While the vast majority of ancient Greek sculptures were made of bronze, we currently know of only a few examples. However, those models became widely known through marble Roman copies such as our torso of a young Dionysus.



This superb torso probably belonged to a European private collector in the 18th or 19th century, given the restoration techniques that were used. The fact Salomon Reinach mentioned that it was in Rome in the Francesco De Sanctis collection in 1916 supports that hypothesis. De Sanctis, a sculptor who was active in around 1800, had a workshop in Via dei Greci with the sculptor Annibale Malatesta. Our torso then joined the Belloni collection in Italy, before being acquired from the Parisian Galerie Uraeus (ill. 9) by the Greek American collector and trader Alexandre Iolas (1908-1987 - ill. 10) in the 1960s. He then gave it to André Mourgues (ill. 11), his partner and collaborator. Born in Egypt, Iolas was a collector who was passionate about ancient Greek and Egyptian objects and modern art. In 1948, he opened the Hugo Gallery in New York and, later, a second gallery in Paris. He was one of the first gallerists to exhibit artists such as Andy Warhol, Max Ernst and René Magritte, to mention only a few.

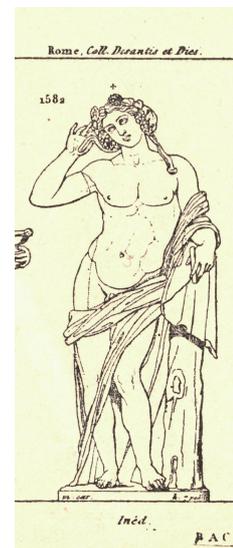
Comparatives:



- Ill. 1. Torso of Dionysus, Roman, 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 86 cm. National Public Museum, Cherchell, Algeria.
 Ill. 2. Dionysus, Roman, 1st - 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 170,5 cm. Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung, Berlin.
 Ill. 3. Torso of Dionysus, Roman, 1st - 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 15,8 cm. Thorvaldsen's Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark.



- Ill. 4. Dionysus and Ampelos, Roman, 1st - 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 155 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, inv. no. 1914 n. 241.
 Ill. 5. Deity (Dionysus?), Roman, 1st century, marble, H.: 66 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. MNB 692.
 Ill. 6. Dionysus, Roman, early 1st century BC, marble, H.: 72 cm. Antikensammlung, Berlin, inv. no. SK 85.



- Ill. 7. Drawing representing our Dionysus in the De Sanctis collection in Rome. S. Reinach, *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine* ("Inventory of Greek and Roman statuary"), Vol. 1, Ed. Ernest Ledoux, 1916.



- Ill. 8. Group of Dionysus and a satyr, Roman, 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 230 cm. Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung, Berlin.

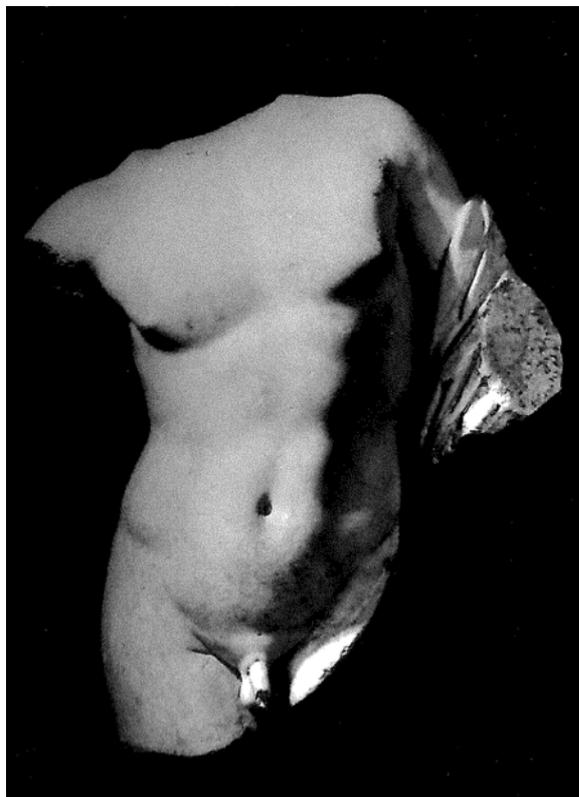
H. 64,5 cm
L. 56 cm

CERTIFICAT D'AUTHENTICITE

Torse viril en marbre. Epoque romaine - 1er siècle après J. Christ. Le marbre est grec. Hauteur 64,5 cm. largeur : 56 cm.
Au 19ème siècle la tête, les bras et les jambes ont été ajoutés pour compléter la statue. Nous les avons enlevés pour ne garder que l'original romain. Il a été cassé en deux morceaux. Les traces de la restauration sont encore visibles. Le sexe de la statue et le pli de la jambe droite ont également été restaurés au 19ème siècle.
Un torse d'un type similaire mais sans draperie sur le bras gauche se trouve au musée de Naples.
Je garantis l'authenticité de cet objet.

U. URAEUS
R. 100 2254
C. 100 2254
CH. COURMAYEUR 18
BOULEVARD SAUREL
59657 219 7271 0009

Provenance collection Belloni (Italie)



Ill. 9. Certificate from Galerie Uraeus and an old photograph that accompanied it.



Ill. 10. Alexandre Iolas (1908-1987).



Ill. 11. André Mourges, photographed by Andy Warhol, March 1972.