

# TORSO OF DIONYSUS

ROMAN, 1<sup>ST</sup> – 2<sup>ND</sup> CENTURY AD  
MARBLE

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HEIGHT: 84 CM.

WIDTH: 31 CM.

DEPTH: 18 CM.

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*PROVENANCE:*  
*FORMER COLLECTION OF MR. AND*  
*MRS. BETHAM, LONDON.*  
*THEN FORMER*  
*FRENCH PRIVATE COLLECTION,*  
*ACQUIRED AT THE URAEUS GALLERY, 24*  
*RUE DE SEINE, 6<sup>E</sup>, PARIS, IN OCTOBER*  
*16TH, 1976.*



This captivating sculpture depicts the torso of Dionysus in an aged white marble. The god, of whom only a torso and thighs remain, is represented by a young athletic man in heroic nudity. The muscles are subtly marked, the abdomen in front, reinforcing this juvenile appearance. The play of curve and counter-curve is present here, the body

taking the S shape characteristic of the *contrapposto* position. The left leg is stretched while the right slightly bent, the line of the pelvis creating an oblique thus contorting the torso. The left hip, full, moves forward into the space, reinforcing the athletic aspect of our young god. Finally, the line of the pelvis is opposed to the line of the shoulders, the left shoulder slightly lowered creating again a very singular torsion. The back, quite fragmentary, reveals muscular buttocks while a tree trunk remains serving as support for the whole sculpture.



Our young god is thus represented in heroic nudity, simply dressed in a skin of an animal. Attached to his left shoulder, it falls on his



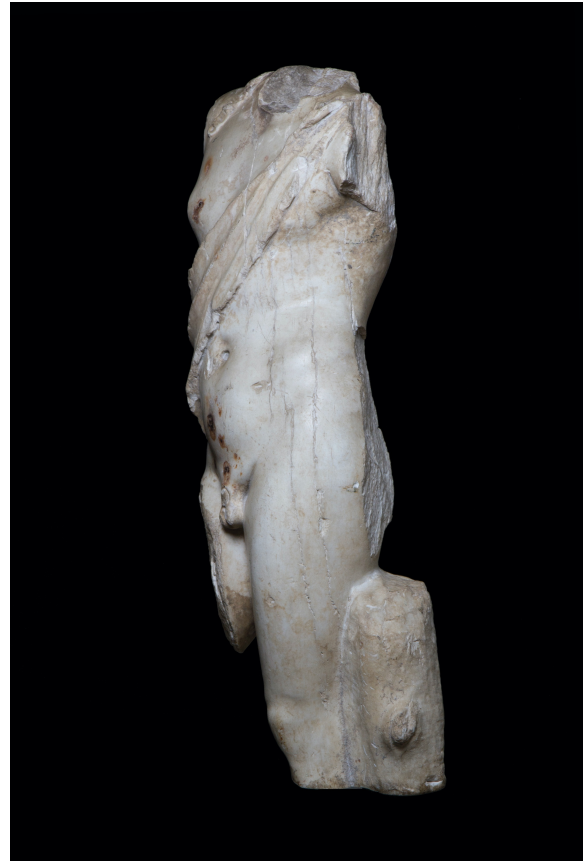
right hip in thick waves. The animal drape, commonly called nébride (in ancient Greek “deer”), is a skin of panther, fawn, or goat, a characteristic of the cult of Dionysus. It was worn by the god himself and by his companions: the satyrs, maenads, bacchantes... The attention brought by the artists in the representation of clothing is marked by the rendering of folds, giving an impression of gravity and a quite singular play of matter. Finally, on his right shoulder is preserved a lock of hair typical of the hairstyle worn by the god.



Our torso is sculpted in a marble marked with an ancient patina and traces of brown, a testament to the passage of time on the stone. Its fragmentary characteristics as well as the browns on the surface of the marble testify to its past history and give our torso a very distinctive aura.

Dionysus, later called Bacchus by the Romans, is the son of Zeus and the mortal Semele. Provoked by jealousy, Hera, the wife

of Zeus, kills Semele whom was still pregnant with the young Dionysus. Zeus saves his son by sewing him into his thigh until he was born. Once born, Hermes delivered Dionysus to the bacchantes and maenads to be raised.



Dionysus is one of the most celebrated divinities in the ancient world, associated with vines and wine, to excessiveness and also wild nature. He is also commonly represented surrounded by his companions in the famous Dionysus procession, including wild animals such as panthers or leopards. This representation of Dionysus in such heroic nudity and his hip, echoes the work of the famous Greek sculptor Praxiteles who developed his art in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. One of his masterpieces, the *Satyr at Rest*, a Roman copy which is the most known in the Capitoline Museum (ill. 1), shows the attention the artists was rendering for the muscularization and details of the body. The *contrapposto* position that we find in this work and in other sculptures thus allows

artists to show their dexterity in the rendering of flesh. Faithful companion of Dionysus, the Satyr sculpted by Praxiteles, also wears an animal skin reflecting the outfit of our young deity. This iconography is also found in beautiful examples in New York, Rome, Madrid, and Santa Barbara (ill. 2-5).

Our torso was first home in the private collection of Mr. and Mrs. Betham, in London and later joined the collection of Galerie Uraeus, located at 24 rue de Seine in the 6<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris. It was then photographed for a Maison & Jardin company advertisement, published in n°285 of the magazine *Connaissance des Arts*, in November of 1975 (ill. 6). The torso was finally acquired on 18 October 1976 by Mr. F., a private French collector (ill. 7).

### Comparatives:



Ill. 1. The Resting Satyr by Praxiteles, Greek, marble, H. : 170.5 cm. Musei Capitolini, Rome, inv. no. MCo739.

Ill. 2. Marble Statuette of a Young Dionysus, Roman, 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, marble, H. : 38.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 2011.517.



Ill. 3. Statue of Dionysus, Roman, first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, marble, 86.5 cm. Musei Vaticani, Rome, inv. no. MV.2394.o.o.

Ill. 4. Dionysos et une panthère, Romain, 130-140 ap. J.-C., marbre, H. : 97 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid, inv. No. E000105.



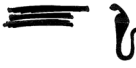
Ill. 5. Dionysos Landsdowne, Roman, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, marble, H. : 134.5 cm. Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, inv. No. 2009.1.1.

### Publications:



Ill. 6. *Connaissance des Arts*, n° 285, November 1975, p. 1.

Provenance:

 URÆUS  
GALERIE D'ART  
ET D'ARCHÉOLOGIE  
ÉGYPTÉ GRECE ROMAINE  
Paris le 16 octobre 1976

FAUVURE

Un terre romain en terre.  
21000 siècle. PRIX : 11000.- Frs

URÆUS  
2, rue de la Harpe  
75001 Paris  
TÉLÉPHONE : 01 42 78 12 34

21 rue de la Harpe  
75001 Paris  
(1) 42 78 12 34



Monsieur F. [redacted]  
Avec plaisir vous lui  
La photo du relief et bonnie  
et j'espère que votre femme  
l'aimera. Le terre vient  
de la Collection de M<sup>r</sup> et M<sup>me</sup>  
Betham (BETHAM) de Londres.  
[Signature]

Ill. 7. Invoice of the Uraeus gallery, 16 October 1976.