

YOUNG DIONYSUS

ROMAN, 1ST-2ND CENTURY AD
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 63.5 CM.

WIDTH: 26.5 CM.

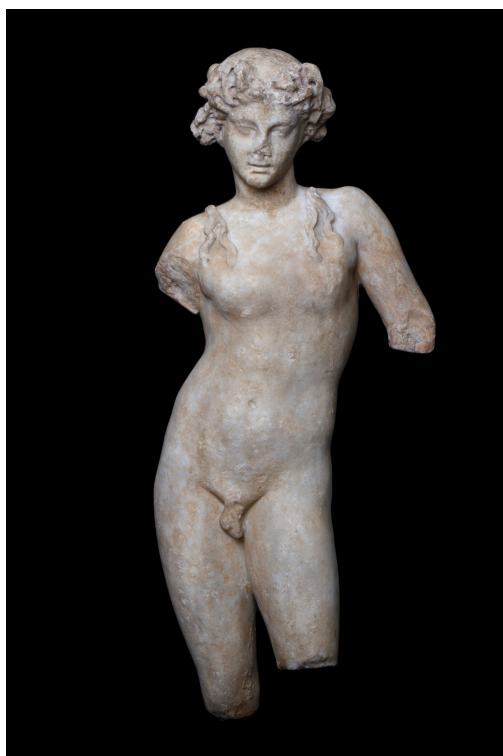
DEPTH: 20 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*FORMER PARISIEN PRIVATE
COLLECTION OF VICTOR ÉMILE
GABRIEL CHEVALLIER (1889-1969) AND
HIS WIFE MARGUERITE JEANNE VEREL
(1887-1962).*

*FROM 1969, IN THE COLLECTION OF MR
X.*

*THEN PASSED THROUGH TWO
INHERITANCES UNTIL 2024.*

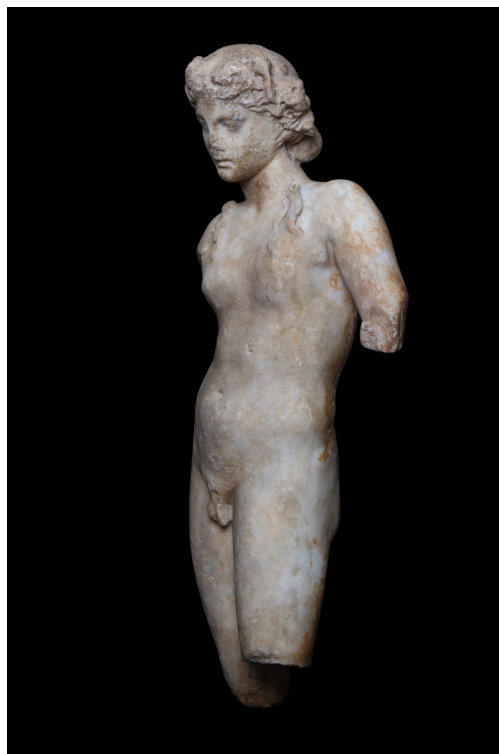


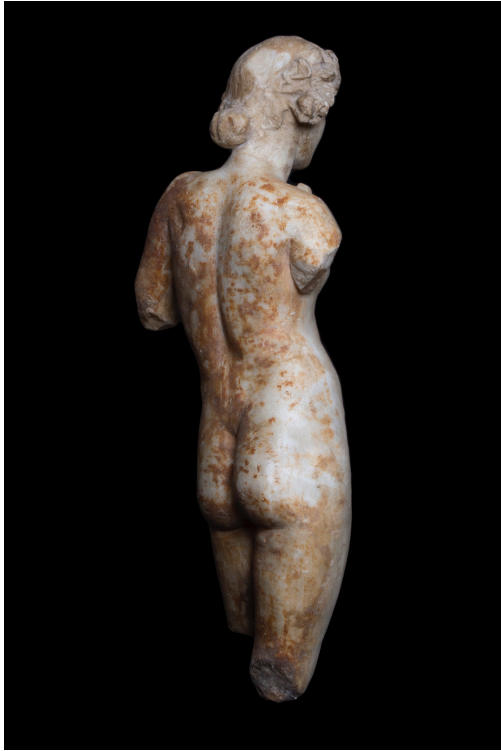
This elegant sculpture depicts a slender nude youth crowned with ivy leaves and corymbs. His long wavy hair, drilled to create deep recesses and lively highlights, falls onto his shoulders and showcases the sculptor's technical mastery. Only two locks remain, but marks on the shoulder blades indicate that hair once fell down his back. His gaze is

cast downward and his slightly parted lips form a delicate, subtle smile.

The softly defined musculature lends the figure a supple appearance, enhanced by the dynamic *contrapposto* pose: the body's weight rests on one leg while the other bends, the shoulders tilting in the opposite direction to create a gentle S-shaped twist. The abdomen projects slightly forward, reinforcing his youthful aspect. From behind, the back reveals subtly modelled buttocks, divided by a deep, realistic central line.

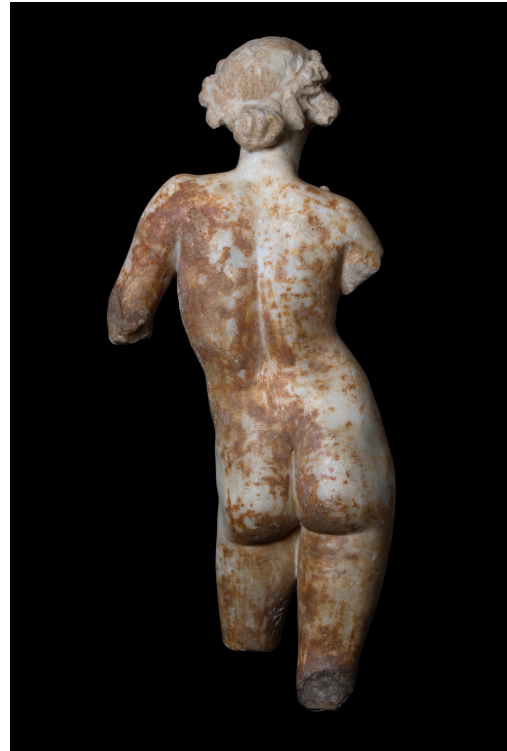
The surface bears an ancient beige patina, a witness both to the passage of time and to the sculpture's distinctive character.





The body of our statue follows an ephebic aesthetic. This political and cultural ideal was developed in the 4th century BC during the era of Lycurgus. It defined a process through which young Athenian men—the ephebes—were trained to become citizens able to defend the city, symbolizing the passage to adulthood. In sculpture, they are usually shown nude, emphasizing youth and a lightly muscled physique. Iconographically, the figure can be associated with a youthful Dionysus, God of the vine, ecstasy, and theatre. Son of Zeus and the mortal princess Semele, Dionysus was saved by his father after Hera killed Semele while she was pregnant. Zeus sewed the unborn child into his own thigh until birth. Ivy—*kissos* in Greek—together with the vine is one of the god's main attributes. The plant was believed to counter the effects of intoxication: according to Plutarch in the *Quaestiones Convivales*, it allowed drinkers to “suffer less from the effects of wine, the coolness of the ivy quenching the fire of drunkenness.” Dionysus is therefore often depicted wearing an ivy wreath and appears in two main sculptural types: the youthful Dionysus—

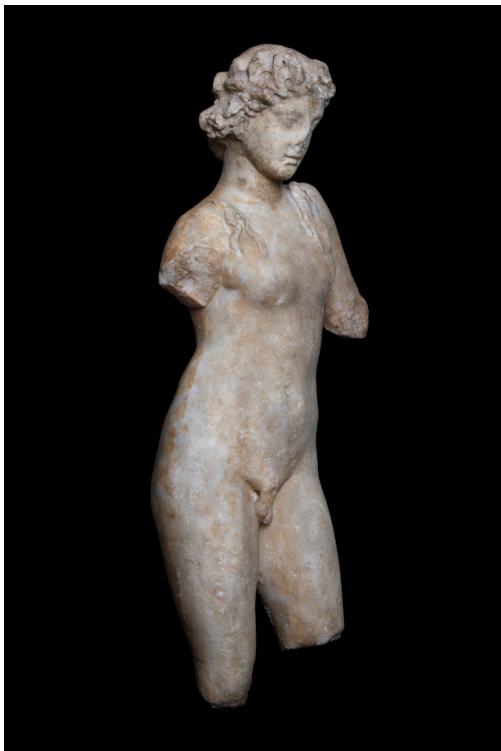
first seen in Greece in the 4th century BC—and the bearded, heavier version, which is more typically Roman. His cult grew stronger in Rome from the mid-1st century BC onward, especially when political figures such as Mark Antony embraced it, even presenting himself as the “new Dionysus.”



The Romans were deeply influenced by Greek art, both stylistically and iconographically. Numerous statues from the 1st and 2nd centuries AD bear witness to this influence.

Our young Dionysus, for example, is stylistically very close to the work of the Greek sculptor Praxiteles. In the 4th century BC, Praxiteles refined and exaggerated the *contrapposto*—the pose first developed by Polykleitos—giving it a more pronounced sway. He also introduced a new type of male figure: instead of the athletic, idealized bodies of earlier Greek sculpture, his youths display softer, more feminine features, flowing sinuous lines, and long or partially gathered hair.

A notable parallel is the Apollo Sauroctonos (ill. 1), whose pronounced *contrapposto* and slender, languid body recall our statue. Also, the Roman sculpture of an adolescent Bacchus from the Villa Chiragan (ill. 2) shares many characteristics with our piece. Inspired by Praxiteles' works, it shows a supple musculature and an androgynous face. Other earlier sculptures may also have influenced the creator of our Dionysus, such as the figure preserved in Berlin and dating to the second half of the 1st century BC (ill. 3).



Very often, Roman representations of Dionysus were accompanied by a support—a tree trunk, pillar, column, or thyrsus—on which the young man leaned. One example can be found in the Louvre, where Dionysus, swaying his hips, rests on a tree trunk (ill. 4), as in the Centrale Montemartini Museum in Rome (ill. 5). Thus, even though our sculpture shows no trace of a possible support, we can legitimately imagine that one may have existed previously. This idea is reinforced by the posture of our Dionysus, whose pronounced swaying hips may have

required a counterweight that the support would have provided.

Hellenistic statues of gods, originally designed for shrines, were diverted from their original function when they were copied by the Romans. Roman sculptures were used more for display purposes, as decoration in Roman villas. It is therefore possible that our sculpture was intended to adorn a domus. The presence of Bacchus in these villas was also symbolic, as Bacchus represented celebration and pleasure, but also served as a warning to choose moderation over excess. This is how the Romans broke with Greek austerity, showing a smiling god, who was conventionally depicted accompanied by his thiasos, or satyrs and maenads, creating a festive, happy, and lighthearted atmosphere.



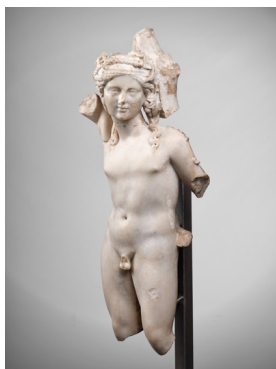
This Dionysus belonged to the Parisian collection of Victor Emile Gabriel Chevallier (1889–1969) and Marguerite Jeanne Verel (1887–1962) (ill. 6). As shown by the inventory of their collection (ills. 7 and 8), the couple owned no fewer than two hundred and forty

artworks. Passionate collectors of ancient art, they assembled pieces from Egyptian, Greek, and Roman civilizations. Having no descendants, they passed the collection on to a family of close friends, who have preserved it for three generations. In the inventory, our statue is described as Hellenistic and attributed to the school of Praxiteles—an error that nonetheless highlights the stylistic similarities. This inventory also makes it possible to determine the date of purchase of these works, all acquired no later than 1969, i.e. until the death of Mr Chevallier.

Comparatives:



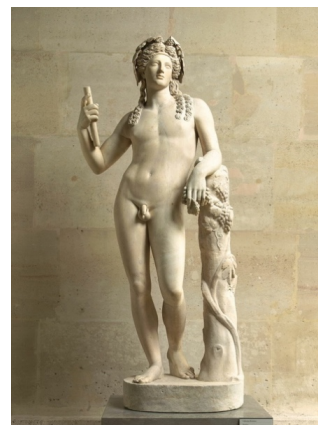
Ill.1. Apollo Sauroktonos, Roman, 25–50 AD, marble of Paros, H. : 167 cm., Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. MR 78.



Ill.2. Bacchus, Roman, 3rd-4th century AD, marble, H. : 49 cm., Musée Saint-Raymond, Toulouse, inv. no. Ra 134-Ra 137.



Ill.3. Young Dionysus, Roman, second half of 1st century BC, marble, H. : 72 cm., Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, inv. no. SK 85.



Ill.4. Statue of Dionysus, Roman, 100 – 150 AD, marble, H. : 197 cm., Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. MR 107.



Ill.5. Dionysus, Roman, marble, Centrale Montemartini, Rome, inv. no. MC 1132.

Provenance:



Ill.6. Photographs of Victor Emile Gabriel Chevallier and his wife Marguerite Jeanne Vedel.



63 Statue représentant ^{une} femme inaltérée. Il est branché parait
pour la femme gracieuse qui est casée au dessus du genou. La jambe droite
est assise au dessus du genou. Le bras gauche est assis à l'horizontale. Le bras
droit ~~gauche~~ droit adhésif rapporté unique - Brève brève brève
au top du

Made par (probable)
Spague Rénovation
dans le Praxiteles.

H. O. G. S.

PHOT.
Album.

Ill.7. Inventory of Victor's Émile Gabriel
Chevallier and Marguerite Jeanne Verel
collection.

Ill.8. Extract of the inventory, wrote by Mr
Chevallier.