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A LAMP-BEARER (?) IN THE FORM OF DIONYSUS FROM 

#### NUMISMATICS

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## A LAMP-BEARER (?) IN THE FORM OF DIONYSUS FROM ANATOLIAN CIVILIZATIONS MUSEUM<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** A rare and nearly life-size bronze statue of Dionysus is displayed in the Classical Artifacts section of the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations. The piece, whose origin of discovery is unknown, was broken into pieces and smuggled abroad. It was brought back to Turkey and reassembled by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Bronze statues in human form were frequently used in the houses of wealthy city dwellers in antiquity. Bronze is reused by melting, which has caused the present statue to become an increasingly rare artifact. This study aims to introduce the bronze sculpture of Dionysus, its possible date of creation, and its intended use by comparing it with similar examples from the Roman Empire. The study conducted thus far, indicates that the artifact may have been used as a lighting device These lighting devices were especially popular in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, and similar examples can be seen in Pompeii. The stylistic analysis indicates that the sculpture is *pasticcio* and contains elements from a wide range of time periods and dates to the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD.

**Keywords:** Roman Imperial Period, Asia Minor, Anatolian Civilizations Museum, Ancient Bronze Sculpture, Dionysus.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Museum of Anatolian Civilizations exhibits in its Classics section a well-preserved bronze statue of Dionysus, crafted in the Roman imperial period. The sculpture was discovered during an illegal excavation in an unknown location in Turkey and smuggled to England<sup>2</sup>. With the initiative of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, it was brought back to Turkey, following a conservation in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, and finally placed on exhibition.

Dionysus is often portrayed as a youthful, long-haired, and effeminate figure<sup>3</sup>. However, this specific figure has a different style, making this a rare statue. His hair is shorter, and his body is softly masculine. The head and body do not seem to be in correlation as stylistic analysis indicates they are from different periods. The head seems to have been attached to the body later in the first or second centuries AD. Major repair patches on the neck and chest also support this idea.

This paper introduces the bronze statue of Dionysus displayed in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations and suggests possible dates for its

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Prof. H.S. Alanyalı, Prof. F. Özcan and Prof. C. Brian Rose for their cordial advices. I also thank Assoc. Prof. Ismail Akkaş, a dear friend and colleague for his support.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://kvmgm.ktb.gov.tr/TR-63171/42-ingiltereden-iadesi-saglanan-bronz-dionysos-heykeli–1-adet–2002.html/. Accessed 26.01.2024.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See LIMC 3, Cat. Nos. 6–25, 98–158 for the images of Dionysus.

production and its function by comparing it with similar examples found elsewhere in the Roman Empire. It also tries to learn why the head and body seem to belong to different periods.

#### **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION AND CONDITION**

Current Location: Anatolian Civilizations Museum, Classics Section.

Inventory Number: Study Group<sup>4</sup>

Finding Location: Unknown (Brought back to Turkey) Material: Bronze.

Height: 1.36 meters (Near life-sized).

Height with Pedestal: 1.41 centimeters.

 $Pedestal: Diameter, 42\,centimeters, height, 5\,centimeters).$ 

Head: 19 centimeters, width, 15.5 centimeters.

Neck: 10 centimeters in diameter.

Arm: Left one is 56 centimeters, right one is missing. Legs: 71 centimeters.



Fig 1. Dionysus, frontal view.

The surface of the sculpture is silvery-green in color and is partly corroded. The body is well preserved despite its right arm is detached from the shoulder. Several patches on the neck pit and left wrist indicate a repair during ancient era. His left hand is slightly closed and filled with bronze cast (Fig 7). Further, a deep chisel mark is visible on the index finger and the pinkie is missing.

The sculpture stands on a round pedestal, for easy moving different parts of the house. The god appears as young, naked and with softly modeled muscle, specifically visible on the upper part of the abdominals and V-shaped adonis that runs diagonally from the hip bones to the pelvic. Its right foot is vertical, carrying the body whereas the left one is slightly bent over, the heel is lifted, and touching the ground with its tiptoes. On the upper torso, the shoulders are slightly inclined. The nipples were highlighted with copper inlays.

Repair patches are visible on the left wrist, neck pit and chest (Fig. 5–6). It appears the left wrist was separated from the body and restored in an unknown era. It is difficult to make definitive remarks here because information of modern restoration is currently absent<sup>5</sup>. Major repair patches are visible on the neck pit and chest. It seems the head was attached to the body later during the ancient era. The head looks small for the body and somewhat stylistically different.

The head is slightly turn to the right. The hair covers the ears, it is wavy, curled from the temples to the ears and it continues to the nape. Above the ears and neck, it is brushed from the crown of the head to the neck. Further, a hanger is vertically placed behind the neck. Dionysus wears a band-shaped crown decorated with vine leaves. The center of the crown is dominated by two clusters of grapes (Fig 5–6).

Dionysus is depicted with an oval face, partially closed round eyes and long-straight nose. His eyes look straightforward and surmounted by thin brows. The eye on the left is larger than the right. Irises are slightly recessed, and pupils are half-moon shaped. There is no trace on what material could be used on the eyes as melted glass or any other. His lips are round, the lower one protrudes over the upper. It is partially open. *Naso-labial* lines are deeply creased. Forehead is strained and moderately covered by the crown. the locks are also half-moon shaped like pupils.

Before ending this headline, modern damage on the sculpture should also be addressed. There are traces of impact on the back, shoulder, and right leg. This was probably done during the illegal excavation by pickaxe. The back side of the sculpture also indicate a clear abrasion perhaps happened due to aggressive cleaning after its discovery (Fig. 2).

#### SIMILAR EXAMPLES

Examples with similar features in appearance, stance, and size are used as lightning equipment in Roman villas. These are well attested particularly in the early Roman empire but most of them did not survive due to ephemerality of the material<sup>6</sup>. One instance is the *Ephebe* or Greek youth, found in 1900 along with its spiral-shaped lamp in a service room in a suburban villa near Porta Vesuvio in Pompeii<sup>7</sup>. It is 1.24 meters high and despite the difference in depiction, the size and pose resemble to Dionysus in Anatolian Civilizations Museum. As Dionysus, Ephebe stands on a round pedestal, naked and has softly modeled musculature. He is depicted with a weight shift in which right foot is carrying the body whereas the left one is free, touching the ground with its tiptoes<sup>8</sup>. His right arm was found detached from the body with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Inventory number has not been given yet.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Tolga Çelik (archaeologist in Anatolian Civilizations Museum) and I have gone through archives but was unable to find any information. I thank him for his cordial support.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, existing ones are well documented. See, RUMPF 1939, 17–27; WÜNSCHE 1972, 45–80; ZANKER 1974, 32–38, BİELFELDT 2018, 420–443; BİELFELDT *et alii* 2022, Chs. 15, 19, 20.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> MELİLLO 2013, 63, Fn. 3; BİELFELDT 2018, 428.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> BİELFELDT 2018, 428.

### Studies

a bronze double-volute tendril in hand (Fig. 3 and 8). His left arm is straight and swinging downwards while his left hand is in a holding position but empty as Dionysus.

The similarities between *Ephebe* and Dionysus are not limited to stylistic analysis. After close inspection, R. Bielfeldt states that *Ephebe* was undergoing conservation in which *the right eye contained a filling of glass paste, erroneously inserted upside down, while the original marble eyes were found discarded inside the statue*<sup>9</sup>. Further, its handle may have been removed from the hand to be repaired or replaced<sup>10</sup>. Here, the important point is not the repaired parts of the object, rather the work was adjusted in antiquity to maintain its utilization. Same assumption can also be made for Dionysus to explain its major repair patches on the body and head. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that the large repair patches may have been the result of dismantling the object while smuggling out of the country. Consequently, Dionysus may have been repaired in both ancient and modern periods.

Another well-preserved example is coming from the Via dell'Abbondanza found in 1925. It was discovered at the House of the Ephebe (Fig. 4)<sup>11</sup>. It is 1.49 meters tall with its base and the stance is similar to the *Ephebe* in Porta Vesuvio. His left hand is lowered whereas the right is bent. Two tendril racks were also found near the sculpture that fit perfectly into the hands to each other. What is more interesting however is the stylistic difference between the classical male body and coiffured severe-style female head, indicating that the craftsman created an eclectic model from two different artwork<sup>12</sup>.

The third example is the statue of Mars found during rescue excavations at Zeugma in 1999–2000 seasons. Measuring 1.50 meters in height, he wears a helmet and turned his head slightly to the left. He has a thick curly hair, surrounds all his head. Mars is well-preserved, represented as naked, and his right arm is raised up possibly holding a spear whereas the left one is bent, carrying a bouquet of flowers comprising tendrils and buds. He is supported by a solid shaft, ornamented with flutes on the left. The shaft stands on a round disk and bell-shaped bases which supported the three panther feet. Overall, the support of the sculpture looks like a *candelabrum*<sup>13</sup>.

These three figures mentioned above and Dionysus share a series of similarities. They are under life-size, naked, and sculpted into retrospective Greek style. They have a round base, so they were not necessarily placed in a chosen room, rather it could be moved wherever light was required. Further they are equipped with bronze handles in the shape of tendrils that show them to be tray-bearers. They were not only carrying lightning equipment, but they might have held vessels as small dishes or gifts for the guests<sup>14</sup>. Except the statue of Mars, they were also repaired and continued to be used. Final important factor is the left hand. Traces of bronze cast inside the hand is clearly visible. It is plausible to assume that he may have been holding a decorative handgrip similar to *Ephebe* in Porta del Vesuvio, later on somehow broken or removed<sup>15</sup> (Fig. 3 and 8). Considering certain similarities, Dionysus should also be used as a lamp bearer.

#### **DIONYSUS IN SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS**

Dionysus is an Olympian god who embodies many characteristics. He is the symbol of fertility, drunkenness, wine, and uncontrollable power in nature, reflecting nature's death in winter and revival in spring<sup>16</sup>. He lives in a world of his own<sup>17</sup>, which opens also to humans, usually with *maenads* and *satyrs* in his entourage<sup>18</sup>. He is benevolent, makes people drunk, and distracts them from their daily problems<sup>19</sup>. He is a warrior<sup>20</sup> who took part in the battle of the gods against the giants, helping Achilleus to wound Telephus<sup>21</sup>. His influence is not only earthly; he promises those who believe in him a happy life after death<sup>22</sup>. He is widely depicted in various works of art such, as vases, mosaics, reliefs, and sculptures. The worship of Dionysus varied according to geography and period and spread throughout the Mediterranean world and beyond for hundreds of years<sup>23</sup>.

The earliest mention of the name Dionysus has been found on the *Linear B* tablets in the 15th century  $BC^{24}$ . Homer, in his Iliad, referred to Dionysus as the joy of mortals but did not associate him with wine<sup>25</sup>. Hesiodos mentioned wine as the gift of Dionysus around 700 BC<sup>26</sup>. The god's relationship with wine is evident in many Athenian vases from the 6th and 5th centuries BC. The most important and earliest of these is undoubtedly the one depicted on a well-preserved black-figure Attican vase bearing Sophilos' signature<sup>27</sup>. The god's popularity grew during and after this period<sup>28</sup>. For example, Dionysus was worshipped magnificently, and Anthesteria festivities were organized in his honor in Athens. These festivities began when flowers began to blossom and lasted for three days<sup>29</sup>. The festivities also included theatrical plays organized in the name of Dionysus. Accordingly, the theater, like the temples, became a place of worship  $^{\rm 30}\!\!,$  and games and festivities were organized there<sup>31</sup>.

Dionysus continued to be worshiped into the Roman period; however, his cult was adopted after a ups-anddowns. He was recognized as the symbol of fertility and was named Bacchus, the Latin equivalent in the 5th century BC<sup>32</sup>. Bacchanalia festivities were organized in his

<sup>16</sup> LURKER 1984, 51; ÖZTÜRK 2010, 37.

- <sup>25</sup> HESIOD, *Opera et dies*, 614.
- <sup>26</sup> BİRCHALL 1972, 107 sqq.

<sup>32</sup> LİVİUS, Ab Urbe Condita, 39.15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> BİELFELDT 2018, 428.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> BİELFELDT 2018, 429.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> MELİLLO 2013, 57.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> BİELFELDT 2018, 430.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> NARDİ/ÖNAL 2003, 69–71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> BİELFELDT 2018, 432.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> BİELFELDT 2018, 431.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> MORAW 2011, 241.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> MORAW 2011, 241.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> FARNELL 1883, 125.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> SEAMAN 2020, 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> SEAFORD 2006, 74.

 $<sup>^{\</sup>rm 22}$  PLUTARCH, *Moralia*, 389b: Plutarch states that Dionysus appears in many forms.

 $<sup>^{23}</sup>$  DRİESSEN 2008, 69 sqq. For the debate on whether the Dionysus mentioned in the tablet is a god or not see HİLLER 2011, 170.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> HOMER, *Iliad*, 14.325.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> KERÉNYİ 2007, 212–223.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> HOWATSON 2013, 60-61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> HOWATSON 2013, 252-253.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> ALANYALI 2023, 299.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> ÖZTÜRK 2010, 46.

honor<sup>33</sup>. However, when the outbursts during the festivities became disruptive to the state order, the senate issued a prohibition decree in 186 BC<sup>34</sup>. Caesar adopted a softer attitude in the 1st century BC. The most important example of this is undoubtedly the wall paintings in the Villa of Mysteries in Pompeii. The composition in the center depicts Dionysus leaning against his mother Semele, or his lover Ariadne<sup>35</sup>. In the same period, Caesar's general Marcus Antony was proclaimed as the new Dionysus in Athens<sup>36</sup>. Antony was similarly hailed as Dionysus by the people of the city in Ephesus<sup>37</sup>. Dionysus was also adopted by the Roman emperors, so much so that Athenaeus noted that Gaius (Caligula) was hailed as the new Dionysus and took care to dress like him<sup>38</sup>. His predecessor, Domitianus, was also associated with Dionysus in the following years<sup>39</sup>. This is important as Dionysus was used as a symbol of political power in addition to his other attributes<sup>40</sup>.

Dionysus' spiritual and geographical sphere of influence reached its peak in the 4th century and beyond when the empire began to embrace Christianity. Seaford explains the influence of God, saying, First, when Christianity was establishing itself in the ancient Mediterranean world, the cult of Dionysus was its most geographically widespread and deeply rooted rival. And so the Christian church, while enclosing the revolutionary ethics of its gospels within the necessity of social control, was influenced by Dionysiac cult as well as opposing it<sup>41</sup>.

Dionysus was recognized throughout the Mediterranean and beyond for more than 1,000 years, promising happiness and life after death that people have always desired. He was depicted in various works of art and appealed to all segments of society. For this reason, the bronze sculpture evaluated within the scope of this study could have been ordinary due to the influence of Dionysus in society. However, the fact that the production material was suitable to be melted down and reused has caused such works to rarely survive the present day and, therefore, makes the study valuable.

It is difficult to make a definite interpretation as to where it may have been used because the work lacks context. However, considering the usage areas of similar bronze statues in the section above, it is possible that the statue of Dionysus may have been used in a dwelling.

#### DATING

Repair patches on the neck and chest, and the stylistic difference between the head and body indicate that the head was crafted on a later period and attached to the body.

The body reminds Polyclitan contrapposto stance from the mid–5<sup>th</sup> century BC, adopted by the Romans and popular in the first century AD. It is difficult to narrow the date range here because, these furnishings had been used for extended periods of time. Examples are dated to the age of Augustus and seen on the *Ephebe* from the Via dell'Abbondanza<sup>42</sup>, *Ephebe* from Porta del Vesuvio<sup>43</sup> and the bronze statue from Volubilis<sup>44</sup>. It is then possible to date the body to the age of Augustus.

The head is noteworthy for Dionysus. Expression is masculine: the hair does not hang from the shoulders as usual in other Dionysus sculptures. Rather it is shorter, limited on the nape and rough. The nose and naso-labial lines are distinct. These features differ him from other Dionysus sculptures. Thus, the head does not offer lucrative evidence for stylistic analysis. The only evaluation criterion could be the large moon-shaped locks and hair itself. Those kind of large curling locks on the cheeks were a sign of youthful beauty. They can be attested for example, Nero's second type portraits<sup>45</sup>. But the hair of Dionysus does not fit into Neronian Period. A closer parallel can be found on the age of Hadrian. During the excavations at Agora Temple at Teos in 2020, a portrait head of Antinous was discovered. The locks on the portrait looks similar to Dionysus<sup>46</sup>. Kadıoğlu dated the portrait to 130s AD, based on lacking engraved iris lines and drilled pupils<sup>47</sup>. Other indication for Hadrianic parallels comes from the portrait of Hadrian itself. The curling of the hair on the temples, the waves above the ears and combed and straight hair on top resemble Hadrian's portrait from Pergamon<sup>48</sup>. Neither iris lines nor drilled pupils are in the portrait. The head of Dionysus then might have been produced in Hadrianic period and attached to the body. This conclusion also explains why the body is more musculature compared with other Dionysus's portraits. The body is perhaps belonged to an ephebe in which the head of Dionysus was attached later.

#### HYPOTHETICAL RECONSTRUCTION

Some parts of the sculpture as the right arm and handlers are missing. The reasons for it are unknown but it might have been damaged due to natural disasters as earthquake, raids, and excessive use. Whatever the reason, similar examples help us suggest a reconstruction. The posture of the shoulder is straight, so it is not possible for the arm to be in the air as in the Mars statue. The broken right arm may have been bent and holding an object. On the left arm, traces of bronze cast are clearly visible. It may have been holding a handle. In the end both hands may have been grappling a tendril and a tray might have been placed above them to hold, oil lamps or other small objects.

#### CONCLUSION

This article had multiple objectives. The first goal is to introduce this valuable and unnoticed work waiting to be studied in Anatolian Civilizations Museum for over two

<sup>46</sup> KADIOĞLU 2022, 55, 61, Fig. 7b.

<sup>48</sup> ÖZGAN 2013, 139, Fig. 145A-B.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> CIL 1.2, 581; TIERNEY 1945–1948, 90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> SEAFORD 2006, 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> CASSIUS DİO, Historia Romana, 50.24.3–4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> PLUTARCH, Vitae Parallelae, Antonius, 24.3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> ATHENAEUS, *Deipnosophistae*, 4.29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> SİLİUS İTALİCUS, Punica, 3. 607–629.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Poloczek states that emperors may have been trying to strengthen their position by referring Dionysus; POLOCZEK 2021, 124–131.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> SEAFORD 2006, 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> SEAFORD 2006, 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> MAİURİ 1926, 337–352; MELİLLO 2013, 57–63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> BİELFELDT 2018, 430; ZANKER 1974, 37.

<sup>44</sup> ZANKER 1974, 34, Taf.. 33.1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> FİTTSCHEN/ZANKER 1994, Pl. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> KADIOĞLU 2022, 62; SMİTH 2018, 24.

decades whose number is quite low due to ephemerality of the material.

The second goal of the study was to understand where the artifact may have been used. To achieve this purpose, an attempt was made to understand the importance of the statue in the life of the Greek and Roman people and its place in social and religious life. The origin of Dionysus dates back to the 15th century BC, and his popularity continued until the Late Antiquity, appealing to all segments of society. The fact that all of his qualities were revered also reveals why the work may have been chosen for the study: Dionysus offers what one expects from life and its aftermath. Therefore, the statue could have been used in anyone's house. If the artifact had a context, a bolder interpretation of the place of use could be made. Nevertheless, considering the place of use and function of similar artifacts, it can be assumed that the statue could have been used as a lighting device in a house.

Another aim of the study was to date the artifact. The marks of repair on the chest indicate that the statue was repaired in classical antiquity. The stylistic analysis of the head and body do not match. The body points to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and may belong to an ephebe. The head, on the other hand, dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD during the period of Hadrian. This also explains why the head and the body are dated to different periods and why the statue was reused in the years following its production. The bronze statue subject to the study is an eclectic product of the Roman Imperial Period used as a lighting tool.

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# Studies



Fig 1–2. Bronze Dionysus From Anatolian Civilizations Musem.



**Fig 3.** Bronze Ephebe From Porta Vesuvio in Pompeii.



Fig 4. Bronze Ephebe From Via Dell'Abbondanza.



Fig 5-6. Detail of Bronze Dionysus.



Fig 7. Detail of Dionysus's left hand.



Fig 8. Tendril detail.