
Antinous as *Apollo Lyceus*? The Double Identity of a Statue from Leptis Magna*

Alessia Di Santi

Der Beitrag behandelt eine berühmte Statue aus Leptis Magna, die ein Porträt des Antinoos auf einem Körper des Apollo in Form des Statuentyps des Apollo Lyceus zeigt. Die Skulptur wird einer erneuten Betrachtung unterzogen, unter besonderen Berücksichtigung der Herkunft, um neue Erkenntnisse über die möglichen Umstände ihrer Entstehung und ihren „hybriden“ Charakter gewinnen zu können.

Introduction

This paper is devoted to a statue showing Antinous ‘as *Apollo Lyceus*’, unearthed from the ruins of Leptis Magna a century ago and now preserved at the Archaeological Museum of Tripolis (Figs. 1–2). This marble sculpture is one of the most famous images of Antinous, the young favourite of the Emperor Hadrian, who was heroized and deified by the same emperor soon after his death by drowning in the Nile in 130 CE¹.

The statue is well-known in archaeological literature, as it is mentioned not only in works solely devoted to Antinous², but also in more general contributions about Roman art; it has often been cited as an example to show how divine statuary types might be used to represent non-divine subjects³. Perhaps as a result of this relative publicity, this statue is commonly known as a statue of Antinous in the style of the *Apollo Lyceus*⁴.

It is critical to emphasize, however, that the portrait of Antinous did not originally belong to this body of Apollo. The original statue was shorn of its original face, and a face of Antinous was then grafted onto the front of the statue head, as if it were a mask. Initial interpretations of this statue asserted that this refashioning occurred under the rule of Hadrian, a reading that persists until the present day. This contribution intends to re-examine this statue, placing special attention on its origin. To this end, we must begin by analysing how this marble statue was first brought to light.

* This paper emerged from a conversation about this case study with Professor Caterina Maderna, whom I had the honor of having on my doctoral committee (Le immagini di Antinoo. Formazione, diffusione e fortuna, discussed in October 2019 at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa. Supervisor: Professor Gianfranco Adornato). Our discussion was extraordinarily enlightening for me, and with this small contribution, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Maderna. Moreover, I would like to thank Pascal Hoffmann and Annika Stöger for having invited me to participate in this collection of essays in honour of Caterina Maderna. I am very grateful to Margaret Kurkoski, who kindly revised the English of my text. Finally, I would like to express special thanks to Gianfranco Adornato for his constant support to my research.

1 For the history and the cult of Antinous, and the huge number of images representing him, which, as stated by Cassius Dio, were widespread «in almost the whole ecumene» (Dio Cass. 69, 11, 4), see Di Santi 2022 (with previous bibliography).

2 Clairmont 1966, 51, n. 38; De la Maza 1966, 392–394, n. 53; Meyer 1991, 82–84, Kat. I 61; Goslar 2007, 82–85, n. 19; Vout 2007, 95–100; Mambella 2008, 234–238, n. 102; Opper 2008, 188; Cadario 2012, 69; Galli 2012, 51; Pudill 2017, 117; Di Santi 2022, 95–99, 227 (cat. 82).

3 See, for example: Richter 1951a, 59; Richter 1951b, 188; Hölscher 2004, 69, 72, 83 (note 23); Hallett 2005, 204–205, 323–324; Zanker 2008, 181, 184–185.

4 Hölscher 2004, 72.

The Discovery

The face of Antinous was first attributed to this statue of the Apollo Lyceus type from the moment of its discovery in the Hadrianic Baths at Leptis Magna during the 1920s excavations. Following his recovery of this statue, the archaeologist Renato Bartoccini wrote the following words:

“Quando si rinvenne la statua, abbattuta bocconi innanzi al suo piedistallo, essa presentava sulla parte anteriore del collo un taglio netto a becco di flauto, con l’orlo inferiore lisciato come per adattarvi un corpo estraneo. Difficilmente però si sarebbe potuto supporre quanto ci rivelarono alcune scoperte avvenute più tardi.

Gli scavi infatti, nel loro proseguimento, ci restituirono una faccia di Antinoo e la zona occipitale della testa originaria dell’Apollo. I due pezzi, giustapposti, combaciaron perfettamente fra di loro e col collo, sicché non ci fu più alcun dubbio, che, in epoca databile con quasi certezza, si scalpellò il volto del Dio di Delfi e al suo posto si applicò quello del nuovo nume creato dal servilismo dei Greci verso Adriano (post 130 d. Cr.).”⁵

The fragments of the statue’s head and body were found in the western pool of the Hadrianic Baths’ *frigidarium*⁶; despite this findspot, we cannot state with certainty whether the sculpture was installed in that place at the time of the baths’ construction (that is, during the last years of Hadrian’s reign c. 130–138 CE), because, as notes Bartoccini, the statue was not associated with any ancient layer of the stratigraphy:

“Nessun pezzo di scultura è stato rinvenuto a diretto contatto col pavimento antico; essi furono evidentemente rimossi dalle loro basi quando il primo interrimento dell’edificio era già avvenuto, specie nelle piscine il cui fondo era situato ad un livello inferiore a quello delle sale.”⁷

More recently, Paola Finocchi suggested that the statue of Antinous could originally have been placed in the western exedra of the Hadrianic Baths’ *palaestra*. She argues that statues of Hadrian and Sabina (now lost) might also have been installed in this space, which therefore would have served as a *Hall of Honor* for the emperor⁸; for the moment, however, it is not possible to confirm this intriguing hypothesis without additional data⁹.

Despite this lack of evidence about the original statue display, Bartoccini expressed no doubts about how the sculpture was created, asserting that the inhabitants of Leptis Magna had removed the original face of Apollo and replaced it with that of the emperor’s beloved, pursuant to imperial will:

“... non si credette di poter rendere altrimenti omaggio all’imperatore regnante, forse per mancanza di spazio, ma con probabilità anche per motivi economici. Ne venne così fuori un insieme ibrido, sgradevole per giunta...”¹⁰;

“Intorno alla sostituzione della faccia dell’Apollo delfico con quella di un Antinoo-Bacco non mi sembra ci sia da far congetture speciali. Servilismo di sudditi, ignoranza di artefici, forse anche grettezza di donatori, composero questo ibrido prodotto...”¹¹

Bartoccini’s reconstruction was based solely on the popular belief that Antinous was worshiped exclusively to please Hadrian. In reality, however, this interpretation, which was commonly ac-

5 Bartoccini 1929, 115.

6 Ibid., 78.

7 Ibid., 100; for the problem of recontextualizing the sculptures of the Hadrianic Baths at Leptis Magna, see also Finocchi 2012, 139–140.

8 Finocchi 2012, 141–142.

9 On this question see also Buccino 2014, 22 and Gilhaus 2014.

10 Bartoccini 1929, 78.

11 Ibid., 118–119.

cepted by other scholars¹², is not supported by any evidence. Ultimately, the sculpture's provenance does provide any information about the moment when the face of the statue was replaced. We cannot rely on the original findspot for further clarification, not only because of its uncertain stratigraphy, as mentioned above, but also because the Hadrianic Baths at Leptis Magna were used for a period well beyond the reign of Hadrian. Long after the baths were inaugurated in 137 CE, they were renovated multiple times, first during the reigns of Commodus and Septimius Severus and again in the 4th century; they were definitively abandoned in the sixth century, when Justinian chose not to include them within the walls that he had built in defense of the city¹³. We cannot therefore exclude the possibility that the replacement of the sculpture's face could have occurred after Hadrian's death, independently from the emperor's supposed will.

The Statue

Although other scholars may agree on the fact that Apollo's face was removed in the Hadrianic era to replace the god's visage with that of Antinous, I conclude that the chronology of this alleged action is far from definite. An autoptic analysis, that I hope could be possible in the near future, would be critical for resolving this question. For the moment, however, we can make some observations by analysing available photographs of the sculpture.

The entire statue, including the base, is 2.24 m high¹⁴. The body represents a naked young man in the form of the well-known *Apollo Lyceus* statuary type, which depicts the god in a relaxed pose with his right hand resting on his head. Although – as Tonio Hölscher already pointed out¹⁵ – in Roman times the body scheme of *Apollo Lyceus* was also commonly adopted for Dionysus / Bacchus, there is no doubt that the sculpture from Leptis Magna originally belonged to a statue representing the god Apollo. This identification is clearly shown by the lateral support in the shape of a Delphic tripod, by the addition of the Python serpent and a bird (eagle?)¹⁶. This statue of Apollo could be dated to the Hadrianic period, like other artifacts from the Hadrianic Baths¹⁷ but, as already observed, an autoptic exam is necessary to confirm this photographic analysis.

The face attached to the back of Apollo's head, as if it were a mask, clearly belongs to Antinous; it is possible to recognize Hadrian's beloved thanks to the presence of his characteristic facial features and hairstyle. More specifically, the wavy locks combed on the fringe correspond to the so-called *variant A* of the main type of Antinous' portraits (*Haupttypus*), which most probably developed in Greece in 131 CE¹⁸. From a technical-stylistic point of view, this face is comparable to other Hadrianic portraits of Antinous, which suggests that a date between 131 and 138 CE is most probable. Similar to other portraits of Antinous, this head is crowned by ivy leaves and corymbs.

12 See, for instance: Bianchi Bandinelli et al. 1964, 49–50 (R. Bianchi Bandinelli), and 100 (G. Caputo – E. Vergara Caffarelli); Meyer 1991, 82–84, Kat. I 61; and Opper 2008, 188: “To the west of Alexandria, in Roman north Africa, the citizens of Leptis Magna similarly seem to have been in a hurry to show their reverence to the emperor, perhaps because they expected Hadrian to visit their city. Thus, they quickly set up images of his recently deceased beloved. To achieve this rapidly, and economically, it seems that they replaced the face of a statue of the god Apollo Lykeios in their recently finished bath building with one of Antinous-Dionysus”.

13 Finocchi 2012, 1.

14 Bartoccini 1929, 114.

15 Hölscher 2004, 69. 83 (note 23). In addition, as suggested by Hölscher 2004, on this topic see Schröder 1989.

16 A detailed description of the tripod is offered in Bartoccini 1929, 114–115.

17 For some general considerations about the chronology of the sculptures from the Hadrianic Baths of Leptis Magna, see Finocchi 2012, 138–139.

18 Di Santi 2022, 50–53. 66–68.

Antinous in the Guise of Apollo or Bacchus?

These attributes deserve closer attention. After all, the ivy crown is a typical attribute of Dionysus / Bacchus, rather than that of Apollo. It is therefore reasonable to wonder why a portrait of Antinous in the guise of Bacchus was affixed to a statue of Apollo. Do we know other examples of similar ‘hybrid’ representations?

Even a cursory survey of Antinous portraits shows that he was often represented with the attributes of one or even two deities at the same time. In the past, I have argued that his multiple forms were the expression of an extremely flexible cult, which was adapted to the various contexts in which it spread¹⁹. More than any other divinity, the young man is most frequently associated with Bacchus. This is evidenced not only by the many sculptures representing him with Dionysian attributes²⁰, but also by numerous provincial coins displaying portraits of Antinous on their obverse²¹. In most of these representations Antinous is indeed crowned by ivy leaves and corymbs, much like the portrait from Leptis Magna. This symbolic association is typically interpreted as an expression of ancient religious syncretism: as Herodotus writes²², Dionysus was considered the Greek equivalent of the Egyptian god Osiris, with whom Antinous shared the premature death in the Nile, and who, like Dionysus, became an expression of rebirth.

That said, the portrait of *Antinous-Bacchus* from Leptis Magna fits perfectly within the known *corpus* of Antinous imagery. Still, other questions arise: why was the statue of *Apollo Lyceus* chosen as the sculpture on which to affix the young man’s face? Did the statue intend to represent an image of Antinous in the guise of both Bacchus and Apollo?

It is true, as mentioned above, that Antinous has been associated with two deities at the same time²³, but no other known representations show the young man with characteristics referring to Bacchus and Apollo simultaneously. There is only one other possible case, but it is very uncertain: a statue of a supposed *Bacchus-Apollo-Antinous*, mentioned by Pirro Ligorio among the finds in the so-called *Biblioteca Latina* of *Villa Adriana*:

“... in una era una bellissima Imagine di Bacco, Apollo con l’effigie d’Antinoo à delitie d’Adriano, la quale havemo trovata rottissima, e dissipata in pezzoli, che i pezzi suoi mostravano molta delicatezza, acciò che in essa si dimostrasse la bellezza d’Antinoo, quella del Sole e di Bacco mista insieme, perché Bacco haveva la Ghirlanda d’edera, d’Apollo la Cetra, e la grandezza, e la faccia d’Antinoo.”²⁴

As a result, there are no extant examples that explicitly support the theory that the statue from Leptis Magna was reconfigured to represent Antinous in the guise of Bacchus and Apollo at the same time.

At this point, however, one could argue that the statue of Apollo was chosen not for its subject, i. e. the Delphic divinity, but rather for the statuary type, which was also widely used for representations of Bacchus²⁵. A debated Antinous head, now at the San Antonio Museum of Art (Texas), may support this hypothesis: it is characterised by an ivy crown and a hand on the top of the head. That said, in the absence of the rest of the body, a deliberate use of the *Lyceus type*

19 Ibid., in particular: 105–119.

20 Ibid., 115–119.

21 Ibid., 36–39.

22 Hdt. 2, 42.

23 This is evident in coins from Tarsus (Cilicia) bearing on the obverse an ivy crowned portrait of Antinous in the guise of Dionysus / Bacchus, with the addition of the so-called hem-hem crown, which instead would refer to an Egyptian deity (RPC III, nn. 3285–3287). It has been proposed that this combination of crowns characterised also some sculptures, which were possibly complemented by a now lost metal hem-hem crown (Di Santi 2022, 23, with previous bibliography).

24 Raeder 1983, 125, Kat. II 1. For the transcription reported here: Cinque 2017, 85–86.

25 On this see note 15.

scheme cannot be confirmed for the whole statue (**Figs. 3–4**)²⁶. Other potential comparanda are even more uncertain. It seems to me that the marble fragments from Corinth, which Mary C. Sturgeon attributed to a statue of Antinous in the *Apollo Lyceus* scheme²⁷, are still of shaky attribution and should not be taken into consideration²⁸. Furthermore, the Antinous sculpture currently on display in Toronto’s Royal Ontario Museum cannot be considered an intentional adoption of this statuary type: it clearly consists of a head belonging to Hadrian’s favourite which was reworked as Bacchus and placed on a bust which originally belonged to a different statue, probably in the scheme of the *Lyceus type* (**Fig. 5**)²⁹. According to this rapid excursus, then, we must admit that the statue from Leptis Magna is a unicum among the known images of Antinous.

As a result of this brief analysis, it appears more probable that the choice to place a face of Antinous in the guise of Bacchus on a statue representing *Apollo Lyceus* was not a deliberate tactic to represent Antinous associated with Bacchus and Apollo at the same time; furthermore, the possibility cannot be excluded that this artistic choice may have been completely incidental, a choice in statue type without deliberate semantic value.

Another ‘Story’ to Tell

At this point, when we consider the standard biography attributed to the statue of Apollo with a face of Antinous, we must observe that this biography is simply the ‘story’ told by Bartoccini, based on his assumption that the face of Apollo was cut out with the sole purpose of replacing it with a portrait of Antinous at a specific moment in the statue’s life (in his reading, this change occurred sometime between the death of Antinous and the death of Hadrian). We must then ask ourselves: is this the only possible explanation for this hybrid composition? A closer analysis of Bartoccini’s reconstruction reveals several weak and unresolved points.

First of all, it is not certain that the head of Apollo was deliberately cut out for the purpose of replacing it; such an act might have seemed disrespectful to the Delphic divinity. In addition, I believe that it may have been easier to rework the head of Apollo rather than cutting it away, raising the question of why a more complex technical procedure was chosen.

More importantly, we should consider whether the face of Antinous had been sculpted specifically for this purpose, or if it too had been cut from a pre-existing sculpture. Curiously, Bartoccini completely neglected these two questions, subsequently publishing no photographs of the back of the ‘mask’ in his report³⁰. These considerations are crucial: if the face of Antinous had in fact been removed from a previous statue, Bartoccini’s exegesis would collapse, as a sculpture representing Antinous would have therefore already existed in Leptis Magna!

That said, another scholar has already proposed a different origin for the portrait. Christoph W. Clairmont drew attention to an Hadrianic epigraphic document, found in the Old Forum of Leptis Magna, near the temple of Liber Pater, in which Antinous is named “*deo frugifero*”³¹. Based on this inscription, Clairmont hypothesized that the portrait of Antinous originally belonged to a statue of the young man represented as “*deus frugifer*”, placed in the temple of Liber Pater³². This

26 Di Santi 2022, 221–222 (cat. 73, with previous bibliography).

27 Sturgeon 2004, 128–131.

28 Di Santi 2022, 171 (note 5).

29 *Ibid.*, 161–165, 226–227 (cat. 81, with previous bibliography).

30 Bartoccini 1929, 78, 114–119.

31 Reynolds – Ward-Perkins 1952, n. 279; Meyer 1991, 165–166 (I E 6).

32 Clairmont 1966, 51, n. 38: “Könnte der Kopf zu der Statue des Antinous Frugifer gehört haben, die im Tempel des Liber Pater auf dem Forum Vetus gestanden hat und deren Existenz durch eine Inschrift bezeugt ist? Trifft dies nicht zu, so muss es sicher zwei Statuen des Antinous in Leptis Magna gegeben haben.”

proposal was rejected, too hastily in my opinion, by Hubertus Manderscheid³³. It was later swept under the rug by Hugo Meyer, the author of the standard reference text on Antinous³⁴; as a result, later scholars have passed over the origin of this Antinous portrait, considering it nothing more than a bespoke addition created for the statue of Apollo placed in the Hadrianic baths of the city.

Still, we should not ignore the documented association between Dionysus / Bacchus and Liber Pater³⁵. Accordingly, I believe that the older interpretation cannot be definitively dismissed, namely that the portrait of Antinous may have originally belonged to a sculpture representing him in the guise of Bacchus (*frugifer?*), placed in the temple of Liber Pater and later adapted for the statue of Apollo.

Should we accept the last hypothesis, however, the reason why the face of Antinous was placed on the statue of Apollo would still remain unresolved. Furthermore, in this case one might wonder why only the face was replaced, and not the whole head; the latter operation, in fact, would have been a simpler process, as it would not require precisely assembling the two halves of the head, even if it would have involved the re-creation of the hand on the top of the head.

Another possible but – I emphasize – absolutely not definitive answer could emerge by shifting our attention from the representation of Antinous to the image of Apollo, a prospect thus far overlooked by other scholars. I believe we should not reject the possibility that this ‘face lift’ was, in fact, a repair, with the goal of giving a fresh visage to a sculpture that was damaged for some unknown reason. Of course, this proposal is just one more alternative to Bartoccini’s original interpretation. It is possible, if unverifiable for the time being.

Some Final Observations and Conclusions

To conclude, the famous statue of Antinous from Leptis Magna is only superficially well-known: as this contribution shows, several aspects of this ‘hybrid’ sculpture’s biography have yet to be clarified. Despite the impact that its discoverer’s interpretation has had on archaeological literature, from my point of view there are no data that allow us to state with certainty that Apollo’s face was deliberately removed to be replaced with a portrait of Antinous in order to please the emperor Hadrian. This hypothetical creation of an Antinous-Bacchus-Apollo, supposedly conceived by the citizens of Leptis Magna in this “hybrid” (Bartoccini) or rather “syncretistic” (according to others, like Meyer) form, has little evidence supporting it. As seen above, in fact, other explanations are possible for the creation of this statue with a double identity.

Unfortunately, without a close autopsy of the sculpture, it is not possible for the moment to define ‘how’ and ‘when’ the face was replaced. Nevertheless, in my opinion, a deliberate removal of the divine visage seems unlikely, both because it would have been an impious act and also because it would have been easier (and cheaper) to simply rework the god’s face to match the physiognomy of the new subject (which, one should note, is not so dissimilar to that of Apollo).

Moreover, the presence of a non-Apollonian, but clearly Dionysian, attribute in the portrait of Hadrian’s favourite sows doubt in Bartoccini’s reconstruction: although Antinous was often represented with a similar crown made of ivy and corymbs, no comparisons exist that allow us to state that this combination of Dionysian and Apollonian characteristics could have been done on purpose. In addition, we have little evidence to hypothesise that the statue of Apollo was deliberately chosen to associate the portrait of Antinous with this statuary type, as we lack secure examples of an *Apollo Lyceus* representing Antinous. Even in the light of the information we do have

33 Manderscheid 1981, 65, note 457: “... der Fundort in den Thermen wie auch die Tatsache, dass der Kopf Bruch an Bruch auf die Statue passt (Bartoccini, Terme 115), schliessen dies mit Sicherheit aus.”

34 Meyer 1991, 84: “Die Vermutung Clairmonts, zu ihr habe das dem Apollon der Thermen aufgesetzte Gesicht ursprünglich gehört, entbehrt jeder Grundlage, da der Efeukranz Antinoos eindeutig mit Dionysos identifiziert.”

35 Bruhl 1961; on this also Finocchi 2012, 63.

on the statue's discovery, we cannot exclude the possibility that the face was replaced sometime after Hadrian's reign nor the possibility that this event occurred by chance, without any intention to celebrate the emperor's favourite. Indeed, as seen in the last part of this preliminary study, we cannot even exclude the possibility that the replacement was simply intended to repair the statue of the Delphic god!

The explanation proposed by Bartoccini and its widespread acceptance result from the past conviction that any evidence for the celebration of Antinous could only be explained by the will of the emperor who had promoted his cult; a cult which would have been imposed, without any spontaneous reception. Although today we know that this belief is incorrect, it has unfortunately shaped studies about Antinous for a long time. The case examined in this paper should be interpreted as a result of this misconception in past studies, based largely on prejudice³⁶.

Whatever reconstruction seems most likely for the sculpture's obscure origin, I would like to emphasise once again that we cannot state with certainty that this composition responds to a deliberate desire for the representation of 'Antinous as *Apollo Lyceus*'. It is not possible to know whether Antinous was depicted intentionally or coincidentally with the statuary type of the *Apollo Lyceus*, as we lack evidence regarding the circumstances behind the creation of this statue. I therefore urge caution when regarding this sculpture as an example of the adoption of that statuary type for Hadrian's favourite.

In a broader sense, this case-study is critical not only for shedding new light on the *corpus* of Antinous images, but more generally for understanding Roman sculpture as a genre. As mentioned at the beginning of this contribution, the statue of Antinous from Leptis Magna has been taken as a prime example by several scholars in studies on the use of the statuary types. Among these, the one with most impact is without a doubt Tonio Hölscher's book on the semantic system of images in Roman art: in his publication, the sculpture was put forward as 'the example' for the adoption of the *Lyceus type* to represent Antinous; Hölscher proposed that this type was deliberately chosen in order to put "emphasis on the epiphanic radiance of the youth, and on his kinship with youthful deities like Apollo and Bacchus"³⁷. Following Hölscher's lead, other eminent scholars such as Christopher H. Hallett³⁸ and Paul Zanker³⁹ have relied on the statue as an established image of Antinous in the guise of *Apollo Lyceus*.

I do not intend to criticise these previous studies, as their overarching arguments remain untouched. However, we must consider these emerging uncertainties about the origin of this 'hybrid' statue with a double identity, which, as this contribution hopefully demonstrates, are still not resolved today. Ultimately, I believe it would be more appropriate to resist framing this sculpture from Leptis Magna as a certain representation of 'Antinous as *Apollo Lyceus*'.

36 On this: Di Santi 2022, 151–161. 168.

37 Hölscher 2004, 69.

38 Hallett 2005, 204–205. 323–324.

39 Zanker 2008, 181. 184–185.

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Figures

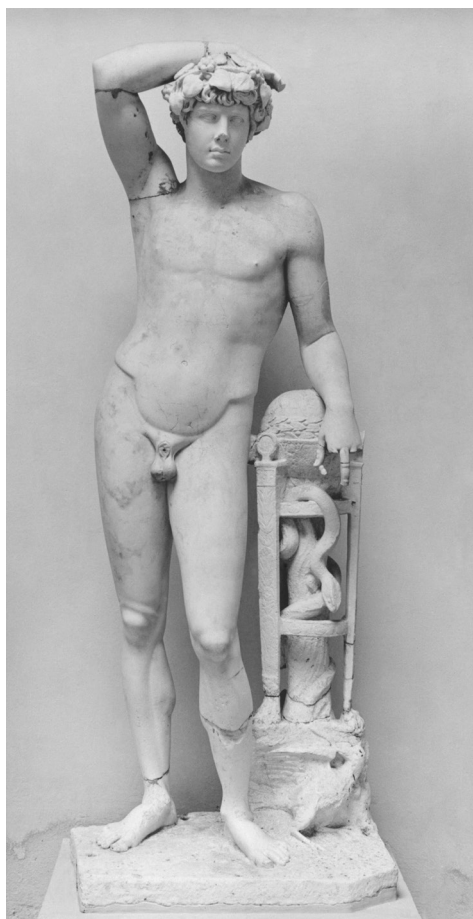


Fig. 1: Statue of Apollo with portrait of Antinous. Tripolis, Archaeological Museum, inv. n. 12. Photo: Koppermann H., Neg. D-DAI-ROM 61.1779.



Fig. 2: Statue of Apollo with portrait of Antinous. Tripolis, Archaeological Museum, inv. n. 12. Left profile. Photo: Koppermann H., Neg. D-DAI-ROM 61.1554, detail.



Fig. 3: Head of Antinous. San Antonio Museum of Art, inv. n. 86.134.164. Image courtesy of the San Antonio Museum of Art.



Fig. 4: Head of Antinous. San Antonio Museum of Art, inv. n. 86.134.164. Left profile. Image courtesy of the San Antonio Museum of Art.



Fig. 5: Head of Antinous reworked as Bacchus and placed on a bust which originally belonged to a different statue. Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, inv. n. 925.23.24. Courtesy of ROM (Royal Ontario Museum), Toronto, Canada. ©ROM.