

## AN ETRUSCAN BRONZE FIGURE OF A MALE VOTARY IN CINCINNATI: AN EXAMINATION OF ITS STYLE

(Con le tavv. IX-X f.t.)

This article focuses upon a unique Etruscan bronze figure recently acquired by the Cincinnati Art Museum (*tav. IX a-e*)<sup>1</sup>. In a manner typical of Hellenistic Etruscan work, this elegant statuette is notably elongated in proportion, a feature that finds emphasis in its curvy, attenuated legs and overly long, upright neck<sup>2</sup>. The subject depicted is a beardless male youth in the act of worship. The subject's piety is symbolized by the figure's upraised right hand with open palm facing outward, a gesture of reverence; the open palm of the downward extended left hand, equally oversized, held a similar religious connotation. The worshipper depicted is a young adolescent, his age apparent from his youthful physiognomy and the soft features of his unshaven face. The subject's trimmed coiffure with bowl-shaped bangs would also suggest a subject of youthful age<sup>3</sup>. In typical fashion, the subject is semi-draped; his lower body is garbed by a long, nearly ankle-length robe, while his upper torso is partially covered by a mantle draped around the left shoulder and gathered over the left wrist. The bronze figurine, in all likelihood, represents a votive offering for deposit in an Etruscan temple or family shrine. Such votive gifts in bronze and clay were regularly offered to Etruscan deities for favors requested or received.

The Etruscans indeed left an artistic legacy in the realm of cast bronze sculpture. Beginning in the sixth century BC, as archaeological evidence has shown, the Etruscan cities of northwestern Italy produced a range of cast bronze sculptures notable for their creativity and technical refinement. The surviving corpus, which represents only a fraction of the original production, bears witness to this fact. This corpus today is

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<sup>1</sup> Cincinnati Art Museum, inv. no. 2009.185. Bronze, cast and burnished, with chased surface details, H. 21.5 cm. The figure was procured from Walter M. Banko, Montreal in 2009. The piece was formerly in the collection of James A. Stirt, Vevey, Switzerland, who acquired it from Heidi Vollmoeller, Zurich, in 1969.

<sup>2</sup> According to Sybille Haynes, Head of Italian Collections, Department of Greek and Roman Art at The British Museum, the piece represents «an unusually strong blend of realism and abstraction» (Personal correspondence, Oct. 27, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> The face and trimmed hairstyle of the statuette compares closely with the bronze figure of an adolescent male votary of elongated variety in the Villa Giulia Museum (O. TERROSI ZANCO, *Ex-voto allungati dell'Italia Centrale*, in *StEtr* XXIX, 1961, pp. 435-437, no. 5, figs. 9-10). According to the author, the piece appears to be the product of a local Etruscan Hellenistic workshop closed to outside influences.

largely devoid of large-scale sculpture; a few head fragments and a handful of surviving statues bear witness to a once-flourishing industry in religious and commemorative statuary<sup>4</sup>.

Although dating later in this series – from the Hellenistic period, the present figure is an example of such sculptural creativity. Its elongated proportions are in keeping with the proportional experimentation characteristic of Etruscan statuary beginning in the late fourth century BC. This trend culminated in the production of very attenuated bronze figurines in the succeeding third century and beyond<sup>5</sup>. The great majority of them exhibit little or no sense of body volume or corporeality; when seen in profile they appear flat and two-dimensional with little sense of depth. An extreme example of such ‘bodiless’ attenuation may be seen in an Etruscan bronze votive figure of a naked boy from Volterra; its stretched verticality is accentuated by its stylized upright pose with pin-like head and feet and thread-like arms held tightly held against its sides (*tav. X b*). It is little wonder that this sleek, minimalized figure known as ‘Evening Shadow’ inspired the Swiss twentieth-century sculptor Alberto Giacometti to produce his sculptures<sup>6</sup>.

The cultural impetus for such elongation in late Etruscan statuary remains unclear<sup>7</sup>; it appears that this stylistic tendency, which is attested at the site of Volterra in northern Etruria<sup>8</sup>, may have come originally from the hill country of Umbria to the east, where many such attenuated figures have been uncovered in excavation<sup>9</sup>. An earlier trend toward abstraction and body elongation may likewise be found in a series of bronze figures of women and armed warriors from Umbria spanning the late sixth and early fifth centuries BC<sup>10</sup>. Here, a warrior figure in Cincinnati is notable both for its elongation and its stylized body geometry<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, such experimentation in exploring form and proportion is extremely rare in ancient art.

In its slim proportions and its *contrapposto*, this figure of an adolescent votary shows a stylistic debt to the Greek bronze master sculptor, Lysippos, who flourished around

<sup>4</sup> For the fragmentary heads, see S. HAYNES, *Etruscan Bronzes*, New York 1985, pp. 300-301, nos. 150, 151; pp. 317-318, nos. 187-190. For surviving torsos or complete statues, see p. 299, no. 146; pp. 318-319, no. 191; pp. 322-323, no. 200.

<sup>5</sup> See O. J. BRENDDEL, *Etruscan Art*, Harmondsworth 1978, pp. 310-314, 330-331, figs. 252, 253; M. CRISTOFANI, *I bronzi degli Etruschi*, Novara 1985, pp. 172 ff, pls. 66, 67, 73-75, 80; and TERROSI ZANCO, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 423-459.

<sup>6</sup> HAYNES, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 322 and 342, no. 199. See also comments of Nigel Spivey in his overview of Etruscan art (N. SPIVEY, *Etruscan Art*, London 1997, p. 145 and fig. 131).

<sup>7</sup> According to Sybille Haynes, these elongated figures are not all the products of a few workshops, but that the locations are scattered. Clearly, a number of them are of Northern Etruscan origin (Haynes, oral communication, Oct. 25, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> See SPIVEY, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp. 144-145.

<sup>9</sup> G. COLONNA, *Bronzi votivi umbro-sabellici a figura umana I. Periodo "arcaico"*, Firenze 1970.

<sup>10</sup> For this Umbrian figural series, see E. H. RICHARDSON, *The Etruscans. Their Art and Civilization*, Chicago-London 1976, p. 108 and pls. XXVII a, b; for additional examples, see R. S. TEITZ, *Masterpieces of Etruscan Art*, Worcester (Mass.) 1967, pp. 142-145.

<sup>11</sup> Cincinnati Art Museum, inv. no. 1906.40. TEITZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 54 and 143, no. 42; and *Cincinnati Art Museum. Collections Highlights*, Cincinnati 2008, p. 288 (illus.)

325 BC. Such influence is particularly noticeable in the figure's stance: the pronounced outward thrust and bend of the subject's right hip, and the forward position of its gracefully bent left leg. The subtle delineation of the latter is particularly noticeable in the figure's right profile view (*tav. IX d*). In Lysippan fashion, the weight is carried on the straight right leg. The Etruscan craftsman, however, had trouble translating the Lysippan *contrapposto* in three dimensions. The statuette's feet show little, if any, displacement in position; from the front they suggest that the figure stands foursquare, which it does not. This failure, on the part of the sculptor, to articulate the legs results in an awkwardness of pose, as the sculptor proceeds upward from the thigh, resulting in a marked thrust to the hip. It is in this hip pose that the impact of Lysippan models may clearly be seen. As Etruscan art expert Sybille Haynes has remarked, such influence points to an early date of production for the statuette in the late fourth-early third century BC<sup>12</sup>.

The widespread influence of the School of Lysippos needs no comment. The sculptor's work, highly noted in his own day, was perpetuated through his three sons and numerous followers, who were active in the Greek world during the early half of the third century BC<sup>13</sup>. Westward artistic influence to Hellenic Italy surely formed a part of that cultural trend, which clearly permeated the Etruscan sphere<sup>14</sup>. An early Hellenistic date for the present statuette finds corroboration in the surviving corpus of Etruscan cast bronzes, which reveal Lysippan influence in their rendering of stance and sense of proportion. A nude bronze figure of a youth in the Fleischman Collection shows such artistic impact manifest on an Etruscan statuette of more naturalistic rendering (*tav. X c*)<sup>15</sup>. As in the case of a youthful draped bronze figure in the British Museum (*tav. X d*)<sup>16</sup>, its *contrapposto* with elongated outwardly thrust hip compares favorably with the figure in Cincinnati<sup>17</sup>. Here we may note the statuette's small head and attenuated torso and legs, features of the Lysippan canon clearly in evidence in the far more stylized figure in Cincinnati.

A comparison may also be drawn with the life-sized head of a boy in the Museo

<sup>12</sup> Oral communication by phone, October 25, 2008. Haynes believes that the figure's exaggerated hip movement represents a conscious attempt by the artist to 'give movement' to the piece, inspired by Lysippan models. In her opinion, it is in the rendering of the hip stance that such movement is connoted, given the fact that the figure stands relatively 'flat-footed'.

<sup>13</sup> A. STEWART, *Greek Sculpture: an Exploration*, New York-London 1990, I, pp. 200-201. As Stewart notes, the output of this sculptural school, almost entirely in bronze, was prolific and widespread.

<sup>14</sup> For the influence of Lysippos and other Greek sculptors in the region of Faliscan Civita Castellana, see HAYNES, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 316. For the earlier influence of fourth-century Greek artists, such as Praxiteles, cf. the large-scale Etruscan bronze statue of the 'Minerva of Arezzo,' which has been recently restored. *Etruscan News*, Newsletter of the American Section of the Institute for Etruscan and Italic Studies, vol. 12, Spring 2010, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Getty Museum, inv. no. 96.AB.35. A. KOZLOFF - D. G. MITTEN, *The Gods Delight. The Human Figure in Classical Bronze*, Cleveland 1988, pp. 254-257, no. 47; K. LAPATIN - K. WIGHT, *The J. Paul Getty Museum. Handbook of the Antiquities Collection*, Los Angeles 2010, p. 131.

<sup>16</sup> HAYNES, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 233, 316, no. 186.

<sup>17</sup> Despite its *contrapposto*, the British Museum statuette exhibits the same flat-footed stance characterizing the Cincinnati figure.

Archeologico, Florence, a rare fragment from a lost bronze votive statue from Italy<sup>18</sup>. Both heads evince a similar conception in their rounded, soft proportions, a feature particularly noticeable in the area of the jowls and chin. Although its chronology is debated, the head in Florence should date no earlier than the late fourth century BC, coinciding with the floruit of Lysippos.

Within the oeuvre of Etruscan Hellenistic sculpture, the Cincinnati statuette is unique in exhibiting a sense of corporeality that distinguishes it from the bulk of attenuated votive bronzes from northern Etruria, which are largely stick-like in conception. As has been previously noted, this trend toward elongation finds culmination in the remarkably abstract, attenuated votive bronze from Volterra in the Guarnacci Museum (see *tav. X b*)<sup>19</sup>. The only figure that compares in its liling proportions and graceful, attenuated s-curved pose is a bronze statuette from Orvieto in the Villa Giulia Museum, Rome (*tav. X a*)<sup>20</sup>. Like the Cincinnati statuette, this figure reveals Lysippan influence in its proportionally small head and its contrapposto with elongated outwardly thrust right hip. Unlike the Cincinnati figure, the Villa Giulia bronze is much more fluid in its body movement, a characteristic that is accentuated by the statuette's supple drapery folds. In contrast, the Cincinnati figure remains stubbornly erect in its upright pose. Both examples are distinguished by their overly large, unarticulated hands. On the basis of its style, the Villa Giulia bronze, which bears a Latin inscription of its dedicator, has been dated to the late fourth or first half of the third century BC. Despite their differences, both figures must surely emanate from the same Lysippan-inspired Etruscan stylistic milieu.

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<sup>18</sup> HAYNES, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 236, 318, no. 190 and color plate, p. 112. Here, a sharp distinction may be drawn with another life-sized Etruscan bronze head of a youth, from the region of Lake Bolsena, which, in its treatment, coiffure, and facial proportions, shows the stylistic influence of the late fifth century sculptor, Polygnotos (see *ibidem*, pp. 211, 300, no. 150).

<sup>19</sup> CRISTOFANI, *op. cit.* (note 5), pp. 180, 275, no. 75.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 172, fig. 66.



*a-e)* Votive figure of worshipper. Provenance unknown. Cincinnati Art Museum, H. 21.5 cm.

*a**b**c**d*

*a*) Votive figure of worshipper. From Orvieto, Museo di Villa Giulia, inv. 24473. H. 27 cm; *b*) Votive figure of youth. From Volterra. Museo Guarnacci, inv. 226. H. 57 cm; *c*) Votive figure of nude youth. Provenance unknown. The J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. No. 96.AB.35. H. 19.7 cm; *d*) Votive figure of youth wearing short mantle. Provenance unknown, British Museum, London, inv. No. 1873.8-0820.13. H. 31 cm.