

## Hermes and Dionysos at Olympia and the Antikythera Shipwreck

Since its discovery in 1877 at Olympia, the marble group of Hermes and baby Dionysos has generated controversy. Is the composition Classical, an original work by the fourth-century sculptor Praxiteles (according to Pausanias), is it a Hellenistic or later copy of his lost original, or is it a Roman statue with no connection to the Athenian sculptor? Right now, the pendulum of opinion appears to be swinging back to the fourth-century scenario. This argument rests in part on the assumption that the sculpture is made of Parian marble, although no scientific testing has been done. According to Palagia, the work would then be fourth-century or early Hellenistic, because Parian marble was not used much at Olympia after this time, supporting the Praxitelean attribution. Furthermore Stewart has argued that the baby god resembles Classical parallels.

There may be another approach to this problem. Hermes' body, highly polished in front, was originally finished smooth but matte in back. The drapery cascading over the tree trunk on the god's left side is plastically dimpled. A thick square strut connects the trunk to the figure's left leg. The marble may be Parian. A look at marbles retrieved from the Antikythera shipwreck may provide clues to the origins of Hermes and Dionysos. Carved from Parian marble, statues preserving their original surface, like a crouching boy (Athens, NM inv. no. 2773) were highly polished in front, with a matte finish in back. Large square struts supported the boy's pose. A drapery fragment from the wreck (Athens, NM inv. no. 15561) displays plastic modeling similar to that of the mantle draped over Hermes' tree trunk.

The Antikythera wreck, dated to the early first century B.C.E., provides a *terminus ante quem* for the statuary, which may have been produced on Delos or at Pergamon. Over 100 years of dispute concerning the date of Hermes and Dionysos at Olympia have distracted scholars from some important details. Originally, Hermes' back was finished and then reworked; there are

patches where the original surface was cut down. His hair was also recut and there is an ancient drilled hole at the base of his back. As Antonsson suggested long ago this figure may originally have been a satyr, frequent guardian of the infant god of wine in Hellenistic and Roman times. Furthermore, the real star of the composition probably was the baby Dionysos. Putting together the marble, working details, and a possible different identity, we can speculate that the group at Olympia may have been a late Hellenistic dedication produced by the same workshops that created the marbles in the Antikythera group. The motivation for the votive gift might be connected with the college of Sixteen Women at Olympia, administrators of the Heraia, the women's sacred foot race, who worshipped Dionysos, and organized his festival at Elis.