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‘Corinthian Bronzes’

Miniature Masterpieces—Flagrant Forgeries

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A prefatory note on forgery

The past can almost never live up to our hopes and expectations. Old buildings, old monuments, old rituals, old writings—inevitably disappoint. They need our help if they are ever going to have the weight and impact we feel they really *ought* to have, in the life of the present, or in the eyes of posterity. They continually have to be remade. This necessary intervention—whether we call it ‘conservation’, ‘restoration’, ‘reception’, ‘correcting’ (or ‘editing’)—is in fact a creative *refashioning*. What is produced is a kind of fiction, aided by the accepted protocols of ‘authenti(fi)cation’. Something antiquated and half-forgotten emerges out of the shadows and is given a new luster, a new significance. It is made conspicuous in the present. Although it is not normally thought of in this way, the forger’s art is undeniably a part of this imaginative engagement with the past.

One way that a powerful longing for the old, the *antique*, can be satisfied is through a sort of cult of ‘relics’: remnants or survivors of such charm and potency that—despite their sometimes battered condition, or decontextualized isolation—they can evoke for our imagination the revered past as the present needs or desires it to be. In this chapter I am going to suggest that in the early first century BCE an entire category of ‘art object’ was devised—at least partly—for this very purpose: to allow Roman collectors the opportunity to possess beautiful and precious slivers, *exquisite miniatures*, of a celebrated artistic tradition that had flourished hundreds of years earlier. If I am right, it should probably be regarded as one of the most successful and artistically important instances of large-scale forgery in the history of western art—though many art historians are surely going to be uncomfortable with my characterization of this phenomenon, and will no doubt balk at the use of the term ‘forgery’ to describe these objects.

Introduction: An hypothesis

A new kind of bronze statuette appears in the archaeological record in the early first century BC (Figs. 1.1–1.2).¹ Such bronze figurines were not made as votives, to be dedicated in sanctuaries. Instead they were intended to serve primarily as *art objects*—specially created to be the treasured possessions of Roman art collectors. There are a good number of these bronzes scattered throughout our most important museums, yet to my knowledge they have never been separated out and studied as a class of object in their own right. This chapter is intended to make a first attempt at doing just this.²

I have two main reasons for addressing these figurines specifically at the start of this volume. First, because they include works of the highest quality, they should unquestionably form part of any account of the art of the Roman Republic; and second, because I believe that such statuettes constitute the category of 'collectible' that Romans of the late Republic called *aes Corinthium*, or *Corinthia*: 'Corinthian bronzes'. As is well known, the authenticity of Corinthian bronzes, as works by the most celebrated Greek sculptors of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, is notoriously called into question by Pliny the Elder in a famous passage of his *Natural History* (HN 34.6–7).³ But before we consider the more complex question of the 'authenticity' of these works, let me first begin by offering a working definition of the class of objects I am referring to, and by explaining why I believe they are to be identified as 'Corinthian bronzes'.

¹ This chapter began as the keynote address at the conference, 'Out of Scale! Aesthetic, technical, and art historical perspectives on Ancient Bronze Statuary', organized by Gianfranco Adornato, to mark the opening of two exhibitions of ancient bronzes in Florence in Spring 2015: (1) *Power and Pathos: Bronze Sculpture of the Hellenistic World*: Daehner and Lapatin 2015; and (2) *Piccoli Grandi Bronzi: Capolavori Greci, Etruschi e Romani*: Arbeid and Iozzo 2015. I subsequently presented it at a number of different venues: the Getty Center, UC Berkeley, the DAI in Rome, Mount Holyoke College, Madison Wisconsin, and Santa Barbara Art Museum. I am grateful to the various audiences on all these occasions for their questions, criticism, and other helpful comments. I would also like to thank Andrew Stewart and Bert Smith for discussing this chapter with me, and for suggesting a number of improvements. But the greatest debt of gratitude I owe to John Hopkins and Scott McGill, who invited me to be part of the extraordinarily stimulating year-long seminar at Rice University's Humanities Research Center in 2017–2018.

² In three previous published essays I have also made reference to 'Corinthian bronzes', and illustrated several statuettes that I believe belong to this category: Hallett 2012, 71–3 and fig. 5.1, the 'Spes Castellani'; Hallett 2015, 126–9, figs. 9.1–9.2: the 'Getty Athena Promachos' and the Louvre 'Diskophoros of Polykleitos'; and 137–8, fig. 9.7: the Apollo from Transylvania in Vienna; Hallett 2019, 89, fig. 11.19: Satyr playing the pipes from the *Villa dei Papiri* in Herculaneum: here fig. 1.20.

³ The bibliography on 'Corinthian bronze', the alloy described by Pliny in this passage, is quite extensive. But up to now there seems to be little scholarly consensus on the topic: see, for example, Giunilia-Mair and Craddock 1993, with earlier bibliography, and Jacobson and Weitzmann 1995, 580–3, for two diametrically opposed readings of the ancient evidence. Moreover—for reasons which will become clear—there have been up to now virtually no attempts to identify any extant bronze statuettes as belonging to this category. Giunilia-Mair and Craddock provide numerous examples of the 'black bronze' they identify as 'Corinthian bronze', but no Greek or Roman statuettes.



Fig. 1.1 Zeus, “Florence Type.” holding long scepter (now missing) in his raised left hand and thunderbolt in his right. Partly hollow cast bronze statuette, set on modern wooden base. 50 BC–50 CE. H: 29.3 cm. Florence, Museo Archeologico, inv. 2291. Photo credit: Sergey Sosnovskiy, su concessione di MAF, Museo Archeologico Nazionale/Polo Museale della Toscana



Fig. 1.2 Zeus, “Florence Type,” detail of statuette seen in Fig. 1.1: head and upper body, showing inlaid copper nipples and silvered whites of the eyes. Photo credit: Sergey Sosnovskiy, su concessione di MAF, Museo Archeologico Nazionale/Polo Museale della Toscana

What distinguishes ‘Corinthian Bronzes’ from all earlier Greek votive statuettes?

Small-scale bronzes (such as the one shown in Fig. 1.3) were a familiar feature of Greek art from the very beginning. Most were created to serve as votive offerings, set up in Greek sanctuaries, and housed in temple treasuries. These statuettes vary in scale and in quality, and embrace a wide array of subject matter. But they are generally all recognizable as the same kind of object: solid cast, wholly of bronze, intended to serve as votives.

Sometime in the late Hellenistic period, however, a new kind of bronze figurine came into being (Figs. 1.4–1.5 and see Figs. 1.1–1.2). Of extremely fine quality—these statuettes were much better than all but the very best of what had existed



Fig. 1.3 Zeus from Dodona. Solid cast bronze. 470–60 BCE. H: 12.7 cm. Athens, National Museum, inv. X 16546. *Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο/National Archaeological Museum, Athens.* © Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού & Αθλητισμού/Ταμείο Αρχαιολογικών Πόρων/© Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/Archaeological Resources Fund. *Τα δικαιώματα επί των απεικονιζόμενων μνημείων ανήκουν στο Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού και Αθλητισμού (ν. 3028/2002)/The rights on the depicted monuments belong to the Ministry of Culture and Sports (l. 3028/2002)*

before. They tend to be larger; sometimes cast in several pieces. The torsos of such figures are quite often hollow-cast, like the bodies of large-scale bronzes.⁴ The limbs, however, are more often solid-cast, made separately and then pieced together. The cold work on these figures is generally much more detailed, and there is a self-consciousness about the decorative quality of the surface that is entirely new. One obvious symptom of this is the extensive use of inlays of various kinds. These statuettes sometimes have small inset irises and pupils of colored glass or stone (e.g., Figs. 1.1–1.2, 1.4);⁵ and they often also show silver inlay in the

⁴ The statuette of Zeus in Florence (figs. 1.1–2) is a good example. It is nearly 30 cm in height (just over one Roman foot), and its torso is hollow cast: see most recently Arbeid and Iozzo 2015, 62–5, cat. no. 1 (with previous bibliography). This Zeus is known in a number of versions, several of them small bronzes; on the type see Berger 1969, 66–92.

⁵ The bronze in the Miho Museum (fig. 1.4) is said to have glass eyes still in place: Inagaki, Green, and Yamazaki 2002, 233, cat. no. 20; the ‘Spes Castellani’ in the British Museum (above n. 2) also had inset eyes, now replaced with diamond-like stones, probably by the modern collector who first acquired her. The Zeus in Florence (above n. 4) once also had inset irises and pupils (now missing: cf. fig. 1.2).

whites of their eyes, on headbands or on helmets, on the border of garments, on armor, and on weapons.⁶ They also have copper lips, and copper nipples (see Figs. 1.1–1.2).⁷ Some even have jewelry added in gold (Fig. 1.5).⁸ In all respects these statuettes are more like exquisite miniatures of *large-scale* bronzes, and they quite often give the impression of being major artworks in their own right. It has been suspected, probably rightly, that a fair proportion of them are actually miniature versions of well-known masterpieces from earlier periods of Greek art: what the Romans called '*opera nobilia*'.⁹ Though in most cases that is now impossible to prove.

Bronze bases

Besides being (at least partly) hollowcast, and intricately inlaid with precious metals,¹⁰ these new bronzes possess a further physical property that I believe is even more significant. The votive statuettes of earlier periods were firmly fixed in place in the sanctuaries where they were set up, and could not be moved.¹¹ But for the *art collectors* of the Roman period it was more desirable that their prize pieces should be portable: so that statuettes could be brought out from cupboards and strongboxes to be displayed to visitors and guests; so that individual displays could be changed and varied; and so that pieces could travel with their owners, from town house to villa, or from one villa to another.¹² For all these reasons bronze figurines specially created for Roman collectors started to be made with

⁶ The 'Getty Athena Promachos' (above n. 2) has silvered eyes, a silver gorgoneion on her aegis, and a silver ornament on the front of her helmet. There are in addition a whole series of holes along the edge of her aegis that were probably intended for separately cast snakes to be added in silver (now lost). The border of the chiton worn by the 'Spes Castellani' (above n. 2) is decorated with a meander pattern inlaid in silver.

⁷ The 'Diskophoros of Polykleitos' in the Louvre (above n. 2) also has silvered eyes and copper nipples. The statuette of Herakles in the Miho Museum (above n. 5) once also had solid copper nipples, but the copper has now fallen out and only the holes for insertion remain (fig. 1.4).

⁸ Aphrodite/Venus from Herculaneum (fig. 1.5): Mattusch 2009, 129–31, no. 39. Three further examples: (1) Aphrodite with gold and silver jewelry, a small Eros at her feet: Mattusch 2009, 131, fig. 2 (Toledo Museum of Art); (2) Aphrodite untying her sandal: Havelock 1971, no. 87 (Paris, Louvre); (3) the Aphrodite Anadyomene from Baalbek, with golden earrings and a golden necklace adorned with semi-precious stones: Fowlkes-Childs and Seymour 2019, 133, no. 93. The latter figure also seems to have silvered eyes and inlaid copper nipples.

⁹ For interesting recent discussions of this controversial question, see Stähli 2014, 133–45; Koortbojian 2015, 43–52; Barr-Sharrar 2017, 107–15. See further, pp. 82–5.

¹⁰ Some of the very finest Greek bronzes to survive from antiquity are of the Geometric and Archaic periods, and these also show evidence of having been inlaid with other metals: see, e.g., Hemingway and Abramitis 2017, 116–22. But the inlays found on very early Greek bronzes seem different in character from the elaborate color effects achieved on late Hellenistic and Roman statuettes.

¹¹ On early display contexts see, in general, Sharpe 2016, 143–50; though the author does not address the introduction of miniature stone bases in the late Hellenistic period, and so offers no discussion of the significance of this innovation. An Etruscan bronze from Pizzidimonte in the British Museum provides a good indication of how securely small statuettes were leaded in place: Richardson 1983, 233–4, pl. 159.

¹² Pliny the Elder HN 34.48 gives a list of Corinthian bronzes that their owners carried with them wherever they went. For the famous sphinx of Hortensius, for example, see p. 53 and n. 17.



Fig. 1.4 Hercules wearing lionskin and carrying his club over his shoulder. Partly hollow cast bronze, with inserted glass iris and pupil (still in place), whites of eyes silvered. First century B.C.E. H: 20 cm (with base). Kyoto, Miho Museum, inv. SS1689. Photo credit: Miho Museum



Fig. 1.5 Venus from Herculaneum, bending down to remove her sandal; nude but for jewelry (armlets and anklets). Bronze, with gilded jewelry, and copper and silver inlay on the bronze base. First century C.E. H: 17.5 cm (with base); H of base: 7 cm. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 5133. Photo credit: Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, su concessione del Ministero per I Beni e le Attività Culturali e per il Turismo—Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli

their own miniature bases. In the beginning, as we shall see, these are likely to have been small stone bases. But eventually a very successful formula was arrived at: the circular bronze molded base (as seen in Figs. 1.4–1.5).

It is useful for the dating of this development that, probably around the same time, in the first half of the first century BCE, a similar kind of bronze molded base was also designed for life-size bronze statues created for Roman domestic decoration. Such bases can be seen, for example, on the famous series of bronze lampholders, or *lychnouchoi*, of which the ‘gilded youth from Pompeii’ and the *Idolino* are probably the best-known examples.¹³ This series is securely dated by the striking mention of this category of fashionable lighting fixture by Lucretius, in his poem *De rerum natura*, c.50 BCE. The Epicurean poet declares that few things indeed are required for bodily contentment. It is certainly no loss, Lucretius writes (2.24–2.26):

*si non aurea sunt iuvenum simulacra per aedes
lampadas igniferas manibus retinentia dextris,
lumina nocturnis epulis ut suppeditentur . . .*

‘. . . if there be no golden images of youths about the house,
upholding fiery torches in their right hands
that light may be provided for nightly banquets . . .’

To my knowledge no circular molded bronze bases, such as the ones used for these *lychnouchoi*, were ever used for life-size bronzes earlier, in the Hellenistic world. But they seem to become quite frequent in the houses and villas of the Roman elite in the late Republic and Early Empire.¹⁴ Such bases enabled full-scale bronzes to be moved around like furniture, wherever the owner desired to have them placed. A whole series of such statues was found in the *Villa dei Papiri* at Herculaneum—the so-called ‘Herculaneum Dancers’.¹⁵ That villa too, and much of its sculptural decoration, must date to sometime around the middle of the first century BC, or fairly soon thereafter.¹⁶

¹³ See the famous essay on the *Idolino* by Rumpf 1939, 17–27. The core group is made up of three bronze statues of youths holding lamps which all have bronze bases of this sort; to this group Rumpf added two more (without surviving bases). A further *lychnouchos* (also without base) was added to the series by García y Bellido 1969, 73–8, pls. 46–9. On the interpretation of these figures, see now Bielfeldt 2018, 420–43 (with bibliography); cf. also the provocative essay by Mattusch 2017, 69–76, designating all these bronzes as ‘luxurious furnishings’ rather than statues. On the *Idolino*, see most recently Daehner and Lapatin 2015, 298–9, no. 51.

¹⁴ For a selection of examples of well-preserved bronzes equipped with such bases, in addition to the series of *lychnouchoi*, see: (1) The bronze Apollo Citharoedus from Pompeii: Sampaolo and Hoffmann 2014, 160–1; (2) The Dionysos/Bacchus from the Tiber: de La Regina 1998, 146–7; (3) The ‘Young Herakles’ in Copenhagen: Moltesen 2002, 245–7, no. 77.

¹⁵ On the ‘Herculaneum Dancers’, see most recently, Lapatin 2019, 172–5, with a new identification as the ‘Appiades of Stephanos’; cf. also Hallett 2015, 133–7, figs. 9.5–9.6.

¹⁶ The construction of the villa is now usually dated somewhere between 60 and 20 BCE: de Simone and Ruffo 2002, 325–44 (60–40 BCE); Guidobaldi and Esposito 2009, 366–8 (40–25 BCE); for a good

One can sum up my argument with regard to all this material as a *hypothesis*—or proposition. I propose that the high-quality bronze miniatures that first appear in the archaeological record in the early 1st century BCE were specially created for wealthy Roman collectors—men of the generation immediately following the dictatorship of L. Cornelius Sulla; men such as Sulla’s stepson, M. Aemilius Scaurus, or his freedman, L. Cornelius Chrysogonus; Sulla’s lieutenant, the successful general L. Licinius Lucullus, and the most brilliant forensic orator of the period, Q. Hortensius Hortalus. The requirements of Roman collectors then gave rise to a new kind of *portable*, high-quality statuette—which was actually a miniature large-scale bronze, with its own base—which could be displayed wherever the owner desired, and easily taken on journeys. We hear in the sources, for example, about Hortensius’ sphinx, that used to accompany the orator whenever he traveled;¹⁷ or the bronze figurine, reportedly the workmanship of the Greek sculptor Strongylion, that M. Junius Brutus, the assassin of Caesar, kept with him at all times—which is referred to in our sources simply as ‘Brutus’ Boy’.¹⁸ The most succinct and convenient way of describing the transformation in function heralded by the creation and addition of these new bases, I believe, is to describe the bronzes in question as ‘art objects’, rather than votives.

‘Corinthian Bronze’—the alloy

Many writers of the late Republic and early Empire write about the ‘craze’ for collecting *Aes Corinthium* (or *Corinthia*); and with this term they are normally referring to two kinds of object: large bronze vessels and small bronze figurines.¹⁹ The most detailed (and in some ways the most perplexing) information we have about the famous ‘Corinthian bronze’ comes from Pliny the Elder (*HN* 34.6–7). This is what he writes:

Ex illa autem antiqua gloria Corinthium maxime laudatur. hoc casus miscuit Corintho, cum caperetur, incensa, mireque circa id multorum adfectatio furuit. . . ac mihi maior pars eorum simulare eam scientiam videtur ad segregandos sese a ceteris magis quam intellegere aliquid ibi suptilius; et hoc paucis docebo. Corinthus capta est olympiadis clviii anno tertio, nostrae urbis dcviii, cum ante haec saecula fictores nobiles esse desissent, quorum isti omnia signa hodie Corinthia appellant.

succinct summary, see Camardo 2019, 105–13. For arguments dating most of the sculpture from the villa similarly early, or at least to the 30s and 20s BCE, see now Hallett 2019, esp. 90–3.

¹⁷ This statuette is described by Plutarch as being of ivory (Plut. *Cic.*, 7); and, on another occasion, of silver (Plut. *Apophth. Cic.* 11); but Quintilian (6.3.98) and Pliny the Elder (*HN* 34.48) both say it was bronze. Pliny in this latter passage expressly affirms that it was a ‘Corinthian bronze’.

¹⁸ On ‘Brutus’ Boy’, Pliny *HN* 34.82; also Martial, 2.77.4; 9.50.5; 14.171.

¹⁹ For a convenient review of the wide-range of ancient literary sources that mention *aes Corinthium*, see Emanuele 1989, 347–58.

quapropter ad coarguendos eos ponemus artificum aetates...sunt ergo vasa tantum Corinthia, quae isti elegantiores modo ad esculenta transferunt, modo in lucernas aut trulleos nullo munditiarum dispectu.

Of the bronze which was renowned in early days, the Corinthian is the most highly praised. This is a compound that was produced by accident, when Corinth was burned at the time of its capture; and there has been an astonishing mania among many people for possessing this metal...; it seems to me the majority of these collectors only make a pretense of being connoisseurs, so as to separate themselves from the multitude, rather than having any exceptionally refined insight in this matter; and this I will briefly show. Corinth was taken in the third year of the 158th Olympiad, which was the 608th year of our city [146 BCE], when for ages there had no longer been any famous artists in metal-work; yet these persons designate *all* the specimens of these artists' work as 'Corinthian bronzes'. In order to refute them we will therefore state the periods to which these artists really belong... The only genuine Corinthian vessels, then, are those which your connoisseurs sometimes convert into dishes for food and sometimes into lamps or even washing basins, without a nice regard for decency.

Pliny purports to tell us several things in this passage:²⁰

- (1) First, that bronze vessels and figurines were called 'Corinthian' because it was thought they were all made out of a special, highly prized alloy that was called 'Corinthian'. Pliny tells us elsewhere that this alloy was produced by a combination of normal bronze (copper and tin) with small amounts of silver and gold (*HN* 37.49).
- (2) Second, that this alloy first came into being at the sack of Corinth in 146 BCE, when the city went up in flames and (allegedly) a lot of different artworks in precious metals were all accidentally melted together.²¹
- (3) Third, the purchasers and collectors of 'Corinthian bronzes' believed that the statuettes in their possession were original works by some of the most famous sculptors of the Classical period.
- (4) Fourth, the claims of the collectors were chronologically impossible. As Pliny describes it, they cannot have it both ways. Either their statuettes are truly 'Corinthian' alloy, or they are by the Classical artists to whom they are attributed. They cannot be both.²²

²⁰ The best analysis of this passage, and of the long discussion of sculptors in bronze that follows, is Darab 2012, 149–59, esp. 155–8.

²¹ For a detailed study of this 'urban legend', citing all the ancient sources, see Darab 2015, 69–82.

²² The garbled account of the origin of 'Corinthian alloy' that Petronius puts into the mouth of Trimalchio suggests that many contemporaries were likely aware that there was something amiss with the collector's claims about their beloved Corinthian bronzes (Petronius, *Sat.* 50). Especially when he makes Trimalchio claim that he is the only one to possess 'genuine' Corinthian bronzes (*Corinthia vera*).

Pliny concludes from all this that—since the antique statuettes were held to be by famous sculptors who lived many generations earlier than the sack of Corinth—only the *vasa* (vessels of various kinds) can ever have been made of Corinthian alloy; not the bronze figurines.²³ We, however, may take away a different message. Many collectors in Pliny's day possessed bronze figurines that they called 'Corinthian bronzes'; and they believed they were by the great artists of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. That is why they prized them so highly, and that is why they were prepared to pay such large sums of money for them; so large in fact, that Pliny describes Corinthian bronze(s) as being more precious than silver or even gold, and Propertius brackets them with gold, goblets carved from precious stone, and vast estates.²⁴

In this chapter I shall advance two propositions:

- (i) That the connection between 'Corinthian alloy' and the popular name for collectible statuettes, *aes Corinthium* or *Corinthia*, that is taken for granted by Pliny, is a false one. The figurines coveted by Roman collectors were probably called 'Corinthian' for quite different reasons, and were almost certainly not made from the special alloy described by Pliny.
- (ii) That many of the statuettes treasured by Roman collectors as works of the old masters (the *antiqui*)—Myron, Pheidias, Lysippos, and so on—were in all probability fraudulently sold to them as antiques. Whether they were actually *created* as forgeries, by the late Hellenistic sculptors who made them, is a different question—now unanswerable. Nevertheless, it is a question worth exploring, as I do in the second half of this chapter.

Before I present my arguments in favor of these two propositions, however, I first want to say a word on what we know about the rise of art collecting among the Roman elite, and the extraordinary art market that developed to serve it.

The art market of the Late Republic and its 'categories of collectible'

It is in the Latin literature of the late Republic that we hear for the first time of wealthy and powerful Romans who are recognizably art collectors: men who surrounded themselves with a wide variety of expensive art objects.²⁵ M. Aemilius Scaurus, for example, (mentioned earlier, as the stepson of Sulla), was famous as a

²³ For more on this, see the following section.

²⁴ Pliny *HN* 34.1: *immo vero ante argentum ac paene etiam ante aurum Corinthio* 'in fact Corinthian (bronze) is valued before silver and almost even before gold'; Propertius 3.5.3.

²⁵ On art collecting in the Roman period, see the anthology of specialized essays in Wellington Gahtan and Pegazzano 2015, with extensive and up-to-date bibliography; especially the ambitious and stimulating concluding 'Afterword' by Elsner, 156–62. But there is much of value still to be gleaned from more general accounts of the Roman art market, such as Alsop 1982, 202–8; Chevallier 1991;

collector of engraved gems. But he also seems to have personally possessed a huge number of famous artworks and luxury products, including bronze vessels and bronze statues.²⁶ L. Cornelius Chrysogonus, on the other hand, according to Cicero, possessed: ‘a house crammed with Delian and Corinthian bronze vessels; among them that *samovar* (or “self-cooker”), which he recently bought at so high a price that passers-by, hearing the auctioneer crying out the bids, thought that a large estate was being sold.’ Cicero goes on to ask, ‘What quantities besides of embossed silver, of coverlets, of panel paintings, of statues, and of precious marbles can you imagine this man possesses?’²⁷ It is in 70 BCE, however, with the high-profile trial of C. Verres—the former governor of the province of Sicily—that we really learn for the first time the *extent* of art collecting among the Roman elite. As is well known, after the trial Cicero, the chief prosecutor, published a series of long speeches against Verres, which have come down to us. And these give us more detail than we could possibly have hoped for concerning Verres’ activities as a collector.²⁸

The collection of C. Verres

What sort of things did Gaius Verres collect? He was most interested in silverware. His general practice was to remove the beautiful figural decoration from old silver and to have it reset on the gold drinking vessels favored by himself and his friends.²⁹ To modern thinking this seems a crass and vulgar practice—the wanton

Bounia 2004, 192–200; Harris 2015, 395–417; and Higbie 2017; all of them written from a variety of different perspectives.

²⁶ Pliny the Elder informs us that Scaurus, a successful lieutenant of Pompey in the war against Mithridates, and the first governor of the Roman province of Syria, was the first Roman to acquire a collection of engraved gems (*dactyliotheam*). Varro declared it to be far superior to the collection of Mithridates the Great, later dedicated in the Capitolium by Pompey: Pliny, *HN* 37.11. He also purchased all the famous old-master paintings from the public *pinacotheca* in Sicyon, which the Greek city had been forced to auction off because of its debts after the first Mithridatic war: Pliny *HN* 35.127. Scaurus’ notorious temporary theater, constructed when he was aedile in 58 BCE, is said by Pliny to have been decorated with 360 marble columns and 3,000 bronzes: Pliny, *HN* 36.113–16. If we are to take this (suspiciously high) number at all seriously, many of them were perhaps large bronze vessels rather than full-size bronzes.

²⁷ Cicero, *pro Sexto Roscio Amerino*, 46.133: *domus referta vasis Corinthiis et Deliacis, in quibus est authepsa illa, quam tanto pretio nuper mercatus est, ut, qui praetereuntes praeconem enuntiare audiebant, fundum venire arbitrarentur. Quid praeterea caelati argenti, quid stragulae vestis, quid pictarum tabularum, quid signorum, quid marmoris apud illum putatis esse?* For a late first-century BCE bronze *samovar* or ‘*samovar*’: Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli 1990, 225 fig. 207, 278, cat. no. 94.

²⁸ On Cicero’s prosecution of Verres, see Mitchell 1979, 107–9, 147–9; Vasaly 1993, 104–30. On Verres’ art collection and the art market: Zimmer 1989, 493–531 and 1994, 867–74; Weis 2003, 355–400; Miles 2008; Lazzeretti 2015, 91–101. See also Lazzeretti 2006—a detailed commentary on Cicero, *Verr.* 2.4.

²⁹ According to Cicero, Verres had his craftsmen remove the embossed figures from antique *phialai* and from various kinds of ritual vessels, and then return these objects to their owners—stripped of their figural ornament. He then set up a workshop in the governor’s residence in Syracuse, where he employed a large number of the finest contemporary silversmiths, attaching the embossed silver relief-work that he had acquired to newly made gold drinking cups, created to his own specifications:

destruction of authentic old figured silver to make something artificial and essentially fake. And no such gold vessels with silver figures, made in this way, have actually come down to us. Yet surviving examples of Roman silverware do show something of what must have been the general effect of Verres' production; and once one gets used to the idea, the combination of silver figures set against a gold background can be seen to be quite impressive.³⁰ It has been inferred that Verres was probably doing the same thing with the embossed figures he found on silver *phalerae* (bridle ornaments for horses).³¹ And Cicero explicitly states that Verres used the figural decoration from silver censers, *turibula*, in the same way. Verres seems to have found a huge number of these in Sicily (see, e.g., Fig. 1.6, though this example is from Tarentum in southern Italy).³²

Such *turibula* were evidently quite popular collector's items in Rome. At least, we see a rather similar one displayed in a somewhat later Roman wall painting from a luxury villa on the Bay of Naples (Fig. 1.7). By the time this fresco was painted, c.50–40 BCE, the silver incense burner in the picture was already an antique. Of course, Verres also looted many other kinds of artwork for his collection, including panel paintings, ivory reliefs, and large-scale bronze statues, some of them said to be by famous artists.³³

Verres' Aes Corinthium/vasa Corinthia

There is one type of collectible, however, that is mentioned again and again in Cicero's account of Verres' tastes: *vasa Corinthia*—'Corinthian vessels'. Cicero always speaks in terms of desirable, antique bronze vessels.

Cicero, *Verr.* 54. Good discussion: Zimmer 1989, 507–20; Weis 2003, 373–7. For the larger cultural context within which we should understand Verres' enthusiasm for antique silver and gold tableware, see now Mastrorosa 2015, 103–5, drawing on a wide range of ancient sources.

³⁰ Verres' production is well analyzed, and treated quite sympathetically, by Zimmer 1989, esp. 518–19. For examples of silver figures displayed against a golden (gilded) background, see (1) the Athena *phiale* from the Hildesheim treasure: Gehrig 1980, color pl. 1 (cited by Zimmer); or (2) the figures from a high-relief cup from the Berthouville treasure: Lapatin 2014, 59–63, no. 32, esp. fig. 33 (shown photographically unfurled as a relief frieze). For a discussion of Verres' gold cups as a kind of 'restaging' of earlier Greek figural relief, see now Hallett 2018, 275–87, esp. 278, 282.

³¹ This is the suggestion of Zimmer 1989, 510–51: the figural decoration of antique *phalerae* could be reset as centerpieces in newly made gold or silver vessels.

³² Wuilleumier 1930, 48–50, pl. 7; 1939, 353–6, pl. XXII.2. Cicero asserts of the Sicilian censers looted by Verres (*Verr.* 2.4.46): *Incredibile est autem quam multa et quam praeclara fuerint*—'the number and beauty of these *turibula* passes all belief'.

³³ For the fullest account of Verres' collection in its entirety, see now Lazzeretti 2015. A brief list enumerating some of his prize pieces reveals something of the range of his tastes: (1) *pinakes*: Verres obtained a very fine set of early Hellenistic panel paintings representing a cavalry battle of King Agathocles from the temple of Athena at Syracuse (*Verr.* 2.4.122); (2) ivory reliefs: from the doors of the same temple he acquired a magnificent set of gilded ivory reliefs of the fifth century BCE (*Verr.* 2.4.124); (3) major bronzes: a portrait of the poet Sappho by the sculptor Silanion came into his collection from the prytaneion at Syracuse (*Verr.* 2.4.126), and a bronze statue of Apollo with the name of the artist Myron inlaid in silver letters on its thigh came from the temple of Asklepios at Agrigentum, (*Verr.* 2.4.93).



Fig. 1.6 Silver *turibulum* (incense-burner, censer) with gilding, from Tarentum. Mid-second century BCE. H: 27 cm. Collection of Edmond de Rothschild, “the Rothschild *thymiaterion*” (no inventory number). After M. Pfrommer, *Studien zu alexandrinischer und grossgriechischer Toreutik frühhellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1987), 207, KT 52, pl. 32.

He never refers to statuettes in this way, as became usual later. Verres is said to seek out ‘Corinthian vessels’ wherever he goes. Rarely we get a bit more information: once they are specifically bronze *hydriae* (Cicero, *Verr.* 2.4.97), such as the one in Fig. 1.8. They are found in sanctuaries and in private households alike.³⁴ Presumably the objects Cicero is referring to would closely resemble the many bronze vessels lovingly represented in second-style wall painting in the Bay of Naples (Figs. 1.9–1.10).³⁵ For all of these large and impressive bronzes—tripods, cauldrons, *hydriae*, and mixing bowls (*krateres*), strategically

³⁴ Collected from cities: Cicero, *Verr.* 2.4.50–1 (Agyrium and Haluntium); from sanctuaries: 2.4.97 (Magna Mater, near Engyion); from private households: Cicero, *Verr.* 2.2.46 (Heraclius of Syracuse); 2.2.83 (Sthenius of Thermae); 2.4.32 (Pamphilus of Lilybaeum, large hydria by Boethus).

³⁵ On the different kinds of objects included in the second-style painted interiors of the villa at Boscoreale: Bergmann 2013, 78–103; Barbet 2013, 149–63.



Fig. 1.7 Silver *turibulum* (incense-burner, censer); detail of a Roman wall painting, from cubiculum (room m) of the luxury villa at Boscoreale. 50–40 BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 03.14.13a–g. Photo credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1903

placed in the atria and triclinia of the mid-first century BCE—are surely drawn from the world of the collectors.³⁶

³⁶ For a systematic account of the representations of bronze vessels in Roman wall-painting, see Riz 1990. That antique bronze vessels like the mid-fifth-century-BCE Argive prize hydria in the Metropolitan Museum (illustrated in fig. 1.8) were collected and regularly displayed in their houses by wealthy Romans is confirmed by the discovery of a similarly inscribed prize Argive vessel in the peristyle court of the 'House of Julius Polybius' at Pompeii: Lazzarini and Zevi 1988–1989, 33–48. See also the inscribed bronze krater, ornamented with lotus leaves inlaid in silver, a gift of Mithridates VI Eupator to some of his followers (Eupatoristai), found in a villa belonging to the emperor Nero at Antium, and now in the Capitoline Museum, inv. MC 1068: Östenberg 2009, 101–2, n. 515, fig. 8. It is my guess that this vessel would have been described as a 'Corinthian bronze' by its Roman owner(s). For a discussion of such *vasa Corinthia* from the *Villa dei Papiri* in Herculaneum, see now Hallett 2019, 78–82, with fig. 11. Pieces of precious silverware also appear artfully disposed within second-style painted interiors. See, for example, the antique silver *kylix* included in a fragment of wall-painting formerly in the collection of Shelby White and Leon Levy: von Bothmer 1990, 201, no. 142 (M. L. Anderson); this fragment has now been returned



Fig. 1.8 Bronze hydria, inscribed “one of the prizes from Argive Hera”; from Argos. H: (with handle) 51.4 cm. Mid-fifth century BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 26.50. Photo credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1926

They are probably modeled on pieces in the actual collections of men such as Verres. Cicero himself, in his dialogue *de finibus*, mentions a list of the lavish accoutrements to fine dining one would expect to find in the luxurious *triclinium* of a *bon vivant*: beautiful boys waiting on the diners, fine coverlets for the couches, silverware, and Corinthian bronzes.³⁷

Despite the general absence of statuettes from Cicero’s account of Verres’ collection, we can be sure that already in 70 BCE choice bronze figurines were highly valued by Roman collectors. For Cicero’s published speech allows us to infer that Verres himself was already collecting them. When Verres’ agents failed to carry off the extraordinarily beautiful old bronze statue of Hercules from its temple at Agrigentum, they are said to have made off with two statuettes (*sigilla*) from

to Italy: *L’Arte Ritrovata* 2019, 92–3, cat. no. 11 (G. Stefani). Silver vessels sometimes also appear in elaborate still life compositions (*xenia*), such as the two paintings from the ‘House of the Stags’ in Herculaneum: de Caro 2001, 74–5, no. 55 (silver *kantharos*, illustrated here fig. 1.22); 76–7, no. 57 (silver jug decorated with embossed figural relief).

³⁷ Cicero, *de fin.* 2.23: *adsint etiam formosi pueri qui ministrent; respondeat his vestis, argentum, Corinthium.*—‘give them also beautiful boys to wait upon them, with drapery, silver, Corinthian bronzes’.



Fig. 1.9 Bronze hydria, detail from a Roman wall painting, from cubiculum (room m) of the luxury villa at Boscoreale. 50–40 BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum, 03.14.13a–g. Photo credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1903

elsewhere in the temple (Cicero, *Verr.* 2.4.95). And from the temple of Ceres in Henna, Verres stole a bronze image of the goddess that Cicero describes as ‘of modest size’ (*modica amplitudine*) but of the most ancient workmanship (*perantiquum*); and, at the same time, his henchmen carried off a small-scale representation of the goddess Victory that was held in the right hand of a large bronze statue of Ceres that stood outside the shrine (Cicero, *Verr.* 2.4.109–10).³⁸ In fact, one of the most famous ‘Corinthian bronzes’ repeatedly mentioned in our Latin literary sources actually came from Verres’ collection: the bronze sphinx that he gave to Hortensius for undertaking to defend him at his trial (Pliny, *HN* 34.48).³⁹

³⁸ Classical and Hellenistic bronze statuettes that survive from Sicily show how fine some of these genuine antiques must have been: e.g., (1) Athlete from Adrano; H: 19 cm; fifth century BCE; Syracuse, Archaeological Museum: Boardman 1995, 197; (2) Herakles from Contrada Cafeo (nr. Modica); H: 22 cm; 200–100 BC; Modica, Museo Civico: Lyons et al. 2013, 68–9. Both of these seem to be genuine Sicilian votive bronzes; but they are of such excellent workmanship they would surely have been regarded as worthy of a Roman collector’s attention.

³⁹ In his satirical account of the origin of Corinthian bronze, given by Trimalchio, Petronius (*Sat.* 50) lists the objects that were most commonly thought to have been made from the ‘new’ alloy: *fecerunt catilla et paropsides et statuncula*, ‘they made bowls, dishes, and figurines’.



Fig. 1.10 Bronze tripod and cauldron, detail of a Roman wall painting from *oecus* (15) of the villa at Oplontis, Bay of Naples, mid-first century B.C.E. After D. Mazzolini (ed.) *Domus: wall painting in the Roman House* (Los Angeles 2004) p. 150; Photo credit: Parco Archeologico di Pompeii, su concessione del Ministero per I Beni e le Attività Culturali—Parco Archeologico di Pompei

What were Corinthian Bronzes?

What can we learn about *vasa Corinthia* from the Verrines? First, the bronzes Cicero mentions cannot possibly have all come from Corinth. Second, it seems highly unlikely that all these vessels, from all these different Sicilian communities, were exclusively made from the special alloy ‘Corinthian bronze’ that is described by Pliny. As was suggested long ago by D. Emanuele, what we seem to be dealing with here is actually what we might term a ‘category of collectible.’⁴⁰ Elegant

⁴⁰ Emanuele 1989, *passim*. Emanuele does not actually use the term ‘category of collectible’, but his (four-part) definition amounts to more or less the same thing. His succinct and perceptive analysis of the ancient literary sources leads him to the conclusion that a Roman might apply the term *aes Corinthium* to ‘any valuable antique bronze’, or any bronze ‘held out as an antique by the seller to the purchaser’ (p. 357). Cf. also his comment (p. 351): ‘By Pliny’s time, any Greek bronze of the Archaic, Classical, or Hellenistic Period was likely to be called Corinthian unless it had some other pedigree. This is clearly the case in Plutarch, who regards as Corinthian all of the bronzes dedicated at Delphi (Mor. 395b–c)’.

antique bronze vessels were probably all referred to as '*vasa Corinthia*' by dealers and auctioneers, once people began collecting these objects in the aftermath of the sack of Corinth by L. Mummius in 146 BCE.⁴¹ 'Delian bronze', on the other hand, was closely associated by Roman collectors with bronze couches or '*klinai*', and their superbly decorated legs and headrests (Pliny, *HN* 34.9). The ancient art market had lots of categories like this. Pliny himself tells us that 'Corinthian candelabra' were not from Corinth, nor were they made of the special Corinthian bronze alloy.⁴² Nor were 'Delphic tables' from Delphi. They were just three-legged, like Delphic tripods. *Vestes Attalicae*—Attalid tapestries—provide another comparable case. These were hangings woven from cloth of gold, and a fine set of them was famously displayed in the *porticus* that Pompey attached to his theatre. No one thought these tapestries were all formerly the property of King Attalos of Pergamon. Nor did such articles all even come from Pergamon. By the mid-first century BCE 'Attalid tapestries' is just the name of a well-known kind of luxury good—a category of collectible: one that takes its name from a famous owner and producer of such things. A similar popular derivation is probably to be assumed for 'Corinthian bronzes'.

From some of the literary references to *aes Corinthium* which describe bronze vessels elaborately decorated with figural designs, Emanuele inferred that a distinguishing mark of '*vasa Corinthia*' was that they very often made use of small bronze figures as an important part of their design.⁴³ Certainly there are a number of examples of Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic bronze vessels that show prominent figural decoration, of various kinds—both in relief and in the round (e.g., Fig. 1.8)—and many items of luxurious furniture of early Roman date make ingenious and elaborate use of small-scale bronze sculpture in this way.

The bronze candelabrum seen in a painted fresco from the luxury villa in Boscoreale, illustrated in Fig. 1.11, is a good example. Emanuele's further

⁴¹ Pliny the Elder explicitly states that the widespread taste for '*Corinthia*' began with Mummius' victory: Pliny, *HN* 37.12. On the prominent role of artworks in Mummius' triumph see most recently Cadario 2014, 83–101 (with bibliography).

⁴² Pliny, *HN* 34.12: *sed cum esse nulla Corinthia candelabra constet, nomen id praecipue in his celebratur, quoniam Mummi victoria Corinthum quidem diruit, sed e compluribus Aethiopiae oppidis simul aera dispersit*—'But although it is admitted that there are no candelabra made of Corinthian metal, yet this name in particular is commonly attached to them, because although Mummius's victory destroyed Corinth, it caused the dispersal of bronzes from a number of the towns of Achaia at the same time.' On this passage see the perceptive comments of Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 373–4: '... what the whole account perhaps reveals most clearly is the confusion in the minds of the Roman buyers, who were aware of the importance of prestigious centers of production, and aware that Greece and Italy were interlocked in the whole business, but attached labels more as desirable brand-names than authentic marks of origin.'

⁴³ Emanuele 1989, 347 n. 3 cites passages of ancient literature which bear witness to this: e.g., Athenaeus 5.199e (Kallixenos of Rhodes); and he explicitly mentions the Derveni krater as an example of the sort of vessels he means: *ibid.*, 350. The passage of Athenaeus describes two particularly fine Corinthian *kraters* on stands that were displayed in the great procession of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. They reportedly had figures in the round seated on the rim, and figures worked in relief on the neck and body. The passage is also discussed by Mattusch, and compared with both the Vix krater and also the Derveni krater: Mattusch 2003, 219.



Fig. 1.11 Bronze *thymiaterion* (candelabrum), detail from a Roman wall painting, from Boscoreale. 50–40 BCE. Naples, Museo Archeologico, inv. S.N. 1. Photo credit: Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, su concessione del Ministero per I Beni e le Attività Culturali e per il Turismo—Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli

suggestion is that some collectors of such furnishings were so attracted by the beautifully fashioned little figures in the round, that (just like Verres with antique silverware) they separated them from the larger vessels or other objects to which they were attached, and treated them as artworks in their own right.⁴⁴ The exquisite bronze statuette of a philosopher illustrated in Fig. 1.12, for example—which

⁴⁴ He makes the suggestion only obliquely, in reference to the small Corinthian bronze purchased by Pliny the younger: Emanuele 1989, 350; for Pliny's statuette see the discussion on pp. 86–9. But what he is proposing is nonetheless clear. He suggests that it may have been 'a decorative figure detached from a candelabrum, a tripod, a mirror, a cauldron, or some other vessel'.



Fig. 1.12 Philosopher, from the top of a bronze candelabrum fashioned in the shape of an Ionic column (only the capital is preserved); irises and pupils once inset in glass or stone (now missing). Mid-to-late first century B.C.E. H: 26.3 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. 10.231.1. Photo credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1910

once stood at the top of a bronze candelabrum—shows how such a thing might in fact happen.⁴⁵

Whatever the truth of this, it is clear that by the time of Pliny the Elder *aes Corinthium* and *Corinthia* were terms most often used to refer to statuettes.⁴⁶

When the ‘Cup of the Ptolemies’ was carved, perhaps in the early first century CE, such statuettes were quite plainly a collectible in their own right (Fig. 1.13).⁴⁷ In the relief carving on the cup a small statuette of Demeter may be seen—fit to be displayed amidst all the other treasures of precious metal, arrayed on what looks like a stone *abacus* or display table of a Roman collector.

Archaeological evidence for ‘Corinthian bronzes’

The earliest securely dated examples

So what, then, is our earliest archaeological evidence for what I am identifying as Corinthian bronzes? On the Antikythera shipwreck there were found six bronze statuettes, ranging from 25 to 50 cm in height: quite large for statuettes (four of them are illustrated in Figs. 1.14–1.17).⁴⁸ Why do I think they are ‘Corinthian bronzes’? Certainly not because of their alloy. It is their workmanship. Their technique makes them instantly recognizable as miniature versions of large-scale bronzes. The statuettes in Figs. 1.14–1.15 both show either inserted stone or silvered eyes; the lips and nipples are now missing, but were originally inset in solid copper. The figure in Fig. 1.14 is an athlete pouring a libation. The *phiale* once held in the open right hand and the jug held in the left were both probably added in silver. Both of these statuettes were cast in several sections: limbs, torso, and head all cast separately, and then combined.

Two of the Antikythera statuettes were actually found together with their original stone bases (Figs. 1.16–1.17). These are quite elaborate.

The base of the figure in Fig. 1.16 is made, according to the publication, from red ‘Laconian stone’. It takes the form of a monumental round cylinder with miniature ‘lifting bosses’ still in place. The bronze in Fig. 1.17 has a more complex base that warrants a closer look. It is composed of three separate elements:

⁴⁵ For another good example, see the lampstand in the form of a Silenos from Herculaneum: Mühlenbrock and Richter 2005, 317–18, no. 8.39; or the two identical bronze table legs ornamented with bronze statuettes of Dionysos in Santa Barbara: del Chiaro 1976, frontispiece, 34, no. 46.

⁴⁶ On Corinthian bronzes as collectibles: Bounia 2004, 195–6; 252–3 (with earlier bibliography).

⁴⁷ Cup of the Ptolemies: Lapatin 2015, 256, pl. 125. The other side of the vessel shows a miniature bronze hip-herm of Priapus included amongst a large set of assembled silverware.

⁴⁸ Six statuettes: Kaltsas, Vlachogianni, and Bouyia 2012, (1) 93 no. 38, inv. X 13397 (here fig. 1.14); (2) 94 no. 39, inv. X 13398 (here fig. 1.15); (3) 95 no. 40, inv. X 13399 (here fig. 1.16); (4) 96 no. 41, X 18957 (here fig. 1.17); (5) 96–7 no. 42, X 18958; (6) 97–8 no. 43, X 15110.



Fig.1.13 Detail of one side of the “Cup of the Ptolemies,” showing a table on which there is displayed a collection of silverware and a statuette of the goddess Ceres/Demeter; kantharos carved from banded agate. 50 BCE–50 CE. H (of entire cameo cup): 8.4 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet de médailles, 368. Photo credit: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/image BnF.

- (1) A circular cylinder of greenish marble, now discolored by the action of the sea. The feet of the statuette were leaded directly into this.
- (2) A roughly square base of white marble was set directly below the cylinder.
- (3) A plinth of red stone was then sunk into this white marble base; the cylinder was connected to the red stone plinth by a large central dowel; and this dowel was fitted with—what the scholar who published the figure calls—‘a rotation mechanism’.



Fig. 1.14 Athlete (?) from the Antikythera shipwreck; partly hollow cast bronze, cast in several pieces; inset eyes of colored stone, alabaster for the whites of the eye, irises and pupils now missing; lips and nipples inset in copper, now also missing. The athlete probably once held a libation bowl in the right hand and a jug in the left, and was pouring a libation. 100–50 BCE. H: 53.5 cm. Athens, National Archaeological Museum inv. X 13397. *Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο/National Archaeological Museum, Athens.* © Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού & Αθλητισμού/Ταμείο Αρχαιολογικών Πόρων/© Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/Archaeological Resources Fund. *Τα δικαιώματα επί των απεικονιζόμενων μνημείων ανήκουν στο Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού και Αθλητισμού (ν. 3028/2002)/The rights on the depicted monuments belong to the Ministry of Culture and Sports (l. 3028/2002).* This credit applies to Figures 1.14–1.17; and 1.25.



Fig. 1.15 Warrior (?) from the Antikythera shipwreck; partly hollow cast bronze, cast in several pieces; inset irises and pupils of colored stone, now missing; nipples originally inset in copper also missing. The warrior wears a military cloak (*chlamys*) over the left shoulder, and probably once held a spear in the right hand, and perhaps a sheathed sword in the parade grip in the left. 100–50 BCE. H: 43 cm. Athens, National Archaeological Museum inv. X 13398. *Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο*/National Archaeological Museum, Athens.



Fig. 1.16 Athlete or Warrior (?) from the Antikythera shipwreck, set on a cylindrical base of red Laconian stone; partly hollow cast bronze, cast in several pieces; inset irises and copper nipples now missing. 100–50 BCE. H: 24 cm. Athens, National Archaeological Museum inv. X 13399. *Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο*/National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Finally there was a hole in the front of the cylinder for the insertion of a metal key; this key—as it turned—would apparently rotate the statuette on its base. One could not ask for a clearer indication that this little figurine was intended to be admired close up, and from all angles, by its owner. This is a base *custom-made* for an art collector.

Only two of the six statuettes found in the wreck were discovered with their bases (see Figs. 1.16–1.17). But a third figure—a boxer, whose elaborate leather



Fig. 1.17 Epebe leaning on a support (now missing) set on two superimposed stone bases, with rotation mechanism; from the Antikythera shipwreck; partly hollow cast bronze, cast in several pieces. 100–50 BCE. H: 25.5 cm. Athens, National Archaeological Museum inv. X 18957. *Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο*/National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

gloves were added in pure copper—also had a base, now lost.⁴⁹ Traces of the base were apparently found when the figure was originally excavated. The official publication concludes that all six statuettes would originally have had stone bases, but that the bases of the other three were probably ‘removed before being loaded on the ship.’⁵⁰ That is probably the wrong inference to make. I would argue that all of

⁴⁹ No. (5), n. 48.

⁵⁰ Kaltsas et al. 2012, 63.



Fig. 1.18 Door inlaid with tortoiseshell, a circular stone altar decorated with reliefs, and a small column supporting a bronze statuette mounted on a red stone base; detail of a Roman wall painting from cubiculum (room m), Boscoreale. 50–40 BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum, 03.14.13a–g. Photo credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1903

the statuettes will have been shipped together with their stone bases: these are collector's items—miniature statues—and they come complete with their own 'monumental' plinths. The Antikythera shipwreck is dated by its pottery to c.60 BCE. It is interesting to observe that not long after this date we encounter small bronze statuettes with bright red stone bases represented in Roman wall painting (Fig. 1.18).⁵¹

⁵¹ Four bronze statuettes are shown mounted in this way on the wall-paintings from the cubiculum (room m) of the Villa at Boscoreale: Bergmann et al. 2010, 31, figs. 55–6.

The first Corinthian bronzes with bronze bases

So what of bronze bases? The earliest-dated Corinthian bronze fitted with a bronze base must surely be the Hermes from the Mahdia shipwreck (Fig. 1.19).⁵² Like all the statuettes from the Antikythera shipwreck, it was cast in several pieces. The eyes and nipples were inset from other materials, but are now missing. The torso was actually hollow-cast, but was then filled with lead, like the figures made for attachment to expensive furniture. Given that the Mahdia wreck is normally dated around twenty years earlier than the Antikythera one (c.80 BCE), this is presumably our earliest securely dated Corinthian bronze. The bronze base of the Hermes, fished up from the seabed at Mahdia, is impressively similar to the bronze base of the 'Satyr Playing the Pipes' found in the Atrium of the *Villa dei Papiri* at Herculaneum (Fig. 1.20); though the base of this latter statuette has usually been thought to have been made in the eighteenth century.⁵³ This kind of base once again imitates the form of a monumental marble one. It was, some years ago, suggested by Richard Neudecker that the Satyr should be accounted a 'Corinthian bronze'; partly because of its obvious high quality, partly because of its findspot in the atrium of a luxurious elite villa.⁵⁴

That the atria of the rich and powerful were places where one might expect to see Corinthian bronzes receives unexpected confirmation from a famous passage of Vergil's *Georgics* (2.461–4):

*si non ingentem foribus domus alta superbis
mane salutantum totis vomit aedibus undam,
nec varios inhiant pulchra testudine postis inlusasque auro vestes
Ephyreiaque aera...*

If you have no stately mansion with proud portals that disgorges into its halls at dawn a flood of clients for the *salutatio*, and they do not gape in astonishment at doors inlaid with lovely tortoiseshell, or at hangings interwoven with gold, or at Ephyrean bronzes...

The poet here evokes the distinctive Roman ritual of the *salutatio*—the early-morning visit to the great mansions of the Roman elite. The lines I have quoted are actually addressed to Italian farmers. The poet begins the passage: 'Oh

⁵² Höckmann 1994, 469–81 and 1.25.

⁵³ Moesch 2009, 147, no. 77; Mattusch 2005, 316–17; Carol Mattusch informs me that, when she and Henry Lie studied the figure, the bronze base was assumed to be modern and not tested. Perhaps the base actually *is* modern; but if so it is surely based on a damaged or fragmentary ancient base originally found with the figure.

⁵⁴ Neudecker 1998, 90.



Fig. 1.19 Hermes from the Mahdia Shipwreck; bronze statuette, partly hollow cast. 100–80 BCE. H: 32 cm (height of base, 10 cm). Tunis, Bardo Museum, inv. F 208. After Hellenkemper Salies, G. et al., *Das Wrack: Der antike Schiffsfund von Mahdia* (Cologne 1994) color pl. 13.

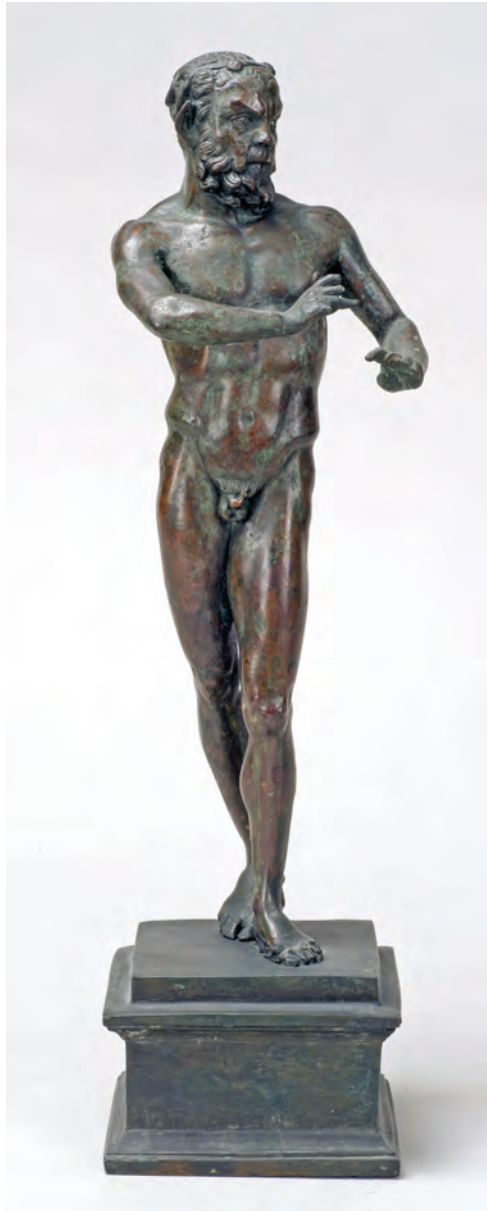


Fig. 1.20 Satyr playing double flute (the pipes were probably originally added in silver and are now missing) from the atrium of the *Villa dei Papiri*, Herculaneum; bronze statuette, partly hollow cast. 50 BCE–50 CE. H: (without base) 29.5 cm. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 5296. Photo credit: Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, su concessione del Ministero per I Beni e le Attività Culturali e per il Turismo—Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli.



Fig. 1.21 Statuette of Aphrodite standing in wooden cupboard in perfume shop; detail from a wall painting from Pompeii, House of the Vettii, showing a frieze of Erotes buying and selling luxury goods. First century CE. Photo credit: De A Picture Library, concesso in licenza ad Alinari

farmers, happy beyond measure if they could but know their blessings!’ They do not have stately mansions—(like the one described in the quotation here), ‘yet still they have sleep free from anxiety, and a life that is innocent of guile...’ The intervening passage gives us a very good idea of what a client might be able to admire in the atrium of a Roman noble family: doors inlaid with lovely tortoise-shell, Attalid cloth-of-gold hangings, and Corinthian bronzes. (*Ephyra* is simply the old poetic name for Corinth.) And in the second-style wall-painting

illustrated in Fig. 1.18, referred to earlier, we see both a mid-first-century-BC door 'inlaid with lovely tortoiseshell', and a bronze statuette of Hecate in Archaic style, on a little red stone plinth, set on a tall columnar base.

Bronze statuettes with 'non-monumental' bases

Small statuettes, movable, and able to stand on their own bases wherever they are set up—are sometimes shown kept in cupboards (e.g., Fig. 1.21). At Herculaneum a whole set of nine such statuettes were found inside a wooden cupboard.⁵⁵ But it is in a 'still life' painting from the 'House of the Stags,' also at Herculaneum, that we see the next development that I want to chart in the history of Roman collectible figurines (Fig. 1.22).⁵⁶ The little bronzes start to acquire bronze bases that now have no relation to the monumental bases of large-scale statues. Instead their bases are designed to suit their size, and to be as practical as possible for a portable work of art. Soon handsome little bronzes were to have their own distinctive kinds of bronze bases, that—with their precious and elaborate inlay—clearly announce their importance as art objects (Fig. 1.23; cf. also Fig. 1.5).⁵⁷

At this point we may perhaps enlist the imagination of one of the leading British painters of the late nineteenth century, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, to show us how he supposed a Roman art collector like Verres viewed his Corinthian bronzes (Fig. 1.24).⁵⁸

Note the bronze presentation table, with the colored marble table-top; the gilded garment of the statuette; and the carefully designed bronze base. Equipping a figurine with its own miniature base in this way gives it a kind of self-conscious completeness that is entirely new (Figs. 1.4–1.5, 1.15–1.16). Like coins, gems, or jewelry, the 'Corinthian bronze' does not depend on some larger context for its meaning or value. It retains its magic, and its power to impress, wherever it is set up (Figs. 1.19–1.20, 1.23). We shall have more to say on the carefully designed bases of such figurines in the third and final section of this chapter.

⁵⁵ Herculaneum, 'House of the Wattlework' (*a Graticcio*): Wallace-Hadrill 2011, 265–6, illustrating three of the bronzes.

⁵⁶ de Caro 2001, 75–7; Nava et al. 2007, 179. For a very similar bronze statuette to the one seen in this painting, though considerably larger (77 cm) see Getty 1994, 273–5, no. 139A; the piece is now in the Cleveland Museum. For another still life painting including a 'Corinthian bronze' figurine, again on a circular base, see Cadario 2015, 57, fig. 6 (from the House of the Vettii).

⁵⁷ Compare here too the large bronze base for a statuette, richly inlaid with silver and copper, illustrated by Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 374, fig. 8.14.

⁵⁸ For the context of this painting within Alma Tadema's *oeuvre*, see Murolo 2007, 54–69. The figure of Aphrodite at the center of the composition is a statuette now in the Naples Archaeological Museum (H: 50 cm; object without inventory number); Querci and de Caro 2007, 285, Arch. 29. The painter has reproduced the figure and its base quite accurately in the painting, though the gilding on the garment seems to be his own invention. For the bronze marble-topped table on which she is set, see *ibid.* 278, Arch. 6 (from Pompeii).



Fig. 1.22 Still life composition showing large bronze platter with assorted foods, silver cup with dregs of wine still in it, head of a sheep, bronze jug, and bronze statuette in Archaic style of bearded Dionysos/Bacchus on a circular base; from the House of the Stags, Herculaneum. First century CE. Naples, National Archaeological Museum inv. 8615. Photo credit: Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, su concessione del Ministero per I Beni e le Attività Culturali e per il Turismo—Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli

On the authenticity of antique ‘Corinthian bronzes’

Corinthian bronzes sold as original works of the most celebrated Greek sculptors

I want to turn now to the question of how these collectible figurines were viewed by their owners: a matter of vital importance for our understanding of the larger significance of these works within the visual culture of the late Republic and early Empire. On this subject, the passage of Pliny we looked at earlier could not be more explicit. The proud collectors of Corinthian bronzes, he tells us, presented all of them as works by the most celebrated Greek sculptors of the Classical period. Not versions or copies, but *originals*. (Hence all Pliny has to do, in order to demonstrate that these bronzes cannot be made of Corinthian alloy, is



Fig. 1.23 Hermes/Mercury from Huis, near Lyon, France; bronze statuette, partly hollow cast. First century CE; H: 15.3 cm (without base). London, British Museum, inv. BR 825. Photo credit: © The Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 1.24 “A Roman Art Lover.” Painting by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. 1868. Dimensions (unframed): 55.9 × 84.5 cm. Yale University Art Museum, inv. 1965.25. Photo credit: Yale University Art Gallery

to show that the famous sculptors to whom the owners attribute their statuettes all lived well before 146 BCE.) What we now have to ask is: were these claims just a matter of unfounded optimism? Something made up, perhaps told to gullible purchasers by unscrupulous dealers or auctioneers? One can almost imagine the conversation taking place in Alma-Tadema’s painting: ‘Just look at the workmanship my lord! This may be an original by the very hand of Pheidias himself.’ Or was there more to it than just hopeful assertions of this kind? Good evidence on this subject is provided by a bronze statuette of Hercules in the collection of Novius Vindex, the friend of the poets Statius and Martial. Here is what Martial writes of this figure (9.44):

*Alcides modo Vindicem rogabam
 esset cuius opus laborque felix.
 Risit, nam solet hoc, leviq̄ue nutu
 ‘Graece numquid’ ait ‘poeta nescis?
 Inscripta est basis indicatque nomen.’
 Lysippum lego, Phidiae putavi.*

I recently asked Vindex whose work and happy labor Alcides was. He laughed, for that is his way, and with a slight nod, "Poet," he said, "don't you know Greek? The base is inscribed and shows the name." I read Lysippus. I had thought it was Phidias's.

This is actually the second of two epigrams Martial writes on this statuette. In the first poem (9.43) he tells us that that the figure was a small bronze (*exiguo... aere*) representing a seated Hercules, holding his club in one hand and a drinking cup in the other. The work, we are told, had previously been owned by Alexander the Great, Hannibal, and L. Cornelius Sulla Felix the dictator, before being acquired by Vindex. Statius, on the other hand, devotes one of his *Silvae* (4.6) to this bronze, and describes it in a great deal more detail. We learn that the figure was to be seen in Vindex' collection at his house in Rome; and it was less than one Roman foot high—so about 29 cm. Notably, that is exactly the same height as the Zeus in Florence (Figs. 1.1–1.2); and only slightly less than the Hermes from the Mahdia wreck, or the Satyr Playing the Pipes from the *Villa dei Papiri* (Figs. 1.19–1.20: 32 cm and 29.5 cm respectively). And we are told that, like these last two, Vindex' statuette had its own base—in this case signed by the sculptor.

The type of Hercules described by Martial and Statius is a very familiar one. It is the Herakles *Epitrapezios* type, known in a large number of versions, at all scales from miniature to colossal, in different materials.⁵⁹ And Statius spells out even more explicitly than Martial, that this small statuette had been specially made by Lysippos for Alexander's dinner table (*mensa*); and it had accompanied Alexander on all his travels. This tale projects back into the fourth century BCE the phenomenon of the 'miniature bronze masterpiece', carried around by its owner, that is recognizably a distinctive feature of the Roman craze for Corinthian bronzes. One thinks of Hortensius—and the sphinx given him by Verres; of M. Junius Brutus, the assassin of Caesar, and of 'Brutus' Boy'; of the emperor Nero and his little bronze Amazon—said to have been the work of Strongylion (also thought to have been the sculptor of 'Brutus' Boy') and itself a famous masterpiece—known as the *'Euclnemon'* from the remarkable beauty of its legs. The ex-consul C. Cestius reportedly took his favorite Corinthian bronze with him even on campaign—and onto the battlefield.⁶⁰ But there is no mention of statuettes being carried about by famous individuals in the Greek world—until

⁵⁹ On the Herakles *Epitrapezios* type, Bartman 1992, 147–86, esp. 171–86 with list of extant versions; see most recently Daehner and Lapatin 2015, 220–1, no. 17 (with bibliography). For a high-quality 'Corinthian bronze' version of the type with inset eyes (though missing its base), 20 cm in height, from Ambelokipi in Athens, see Krystalle-Votse 2014, 101–4.

⁶⁰ Pliny, *HN* 34.48: this C. Cestius Gallus was apparently consul in 35 CE: Rutledge 2001, 213–14, no. 25 (with ancient sources and modern bibliography). Pliny's text unfortunately does not record what Cestius' little bronze represented.

this very poem by Statius. Here, surely, we are dealing with an entirely Roman phenomenon.⁶¹

The inclusion of Sulla the dictator in the list of previous owners of Novius Vindex' statuette of Hercules is a clever one. It was perhaps made plausible by the well-known story that Sulla had habitually carried a golden statuette (ἀγαλμάτιον) of Apollo on his person (ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ)—even in battle—as a kind of amulet or lucky charm.⁶² The statuette is said to have been taken by Sulla from the treasury of the temple at Delphi. Sulla is, to my knowledge, the earliest Roman to have carried around a favorite figurine with him. But this one was reportedly of gold, not of bronze.

All of the Romans mentioned as owning Corinthian bronzes in our sources—Hortensius, Brutus, the emperor Nero, C. Cestius Gallus—are said to have treasured them. And they evidently believed them to be rare and precious originals made by the *antiqui*—the old masters (sculptors such as Lysippos, Pheidias, or Strongylion).⁶³ We know from Pliny the Elder that the prices paid at auction for Corinthian bronzes were extraordinarily high.⁶⁴ It is therefore interesting that, among the 'Corinthian bronzes' I have encountered in researching this chapter, there are a fair number that even today we can tell are miniature versions of well-known statuary types. For example: the 'Apollo of Didyma' by Kanachos, Myron's *Diskobolos*, Polykleitos' *Diskophoros*, Polykleitos' *Diadoumenos*, the Ephesian Amazons, Lysippos' 'Weary Herakles', the portrait of Demosthenes by Polyuektos.⁶⁵ This list could easily be extended. In his book

⁶¹ Pliny concludes his discussion of small statues carried around by famous people with a mention of Alexander the Great. He describes the four (perhaps fairly small) statues or caryatids that supported the 'tabernaculum' (*skene*) of Alexander. These were well known to him because they had been subsequently set up in Rome: two in front of the temple of Mars Ultor, and two in front of the Regia (Pliny, *HN* 34.48). If Pliny had known anything about a tiny statue of Herakles, specially made by Lysippos for Alexander's dining table, then that would surely have made a much better addition to this list. It is clear that—despite his wide reading about ancient art and artists, about Lysippos, and also about the sculptor's work for Alexander—Pliny had never come across any mention of it. The tale is evidently a late invention.

⁶² Plutarch, *Sulla*, 29; a story doubtless drawn from Sulla's autobiography.

⁶³ Cf. Perry 2005, 172: 'The Role of the *Antiqui* in Roman Art', esp. 'Roman textual sources refer repeatedly to the same dozen or so Greek artists, including Phidias, Polyklitos, Praxiteles, Apelles, Protogenes, Zeuxis, and Parrhasios. The notion that these artists functioned, in some sense, as a canon is supported by the forgeries produced in their names.' The author goes on to cite the passage of Phaedrus quoted here (pp. 83–4).

⁶⁴ Pliny *HN* 34.1. It will presumably not have been the *vasa Corinthia*, the 'Corinthian vessels', that were purchased for the most sensational prices, but the statuettes attributed to the old masters, such as Vindex' Hercules signed by Lysippos.

⁶⁵ The *Apollo Phileios of Didyma* by Kanachos: Mattusch 2009, 132–3, no. 41 (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale); *Myron's Diskobolos*: Maass 1979, 36–7 (Munich, Glyptothek); *Krystalle-Votse* 2014, 64–7, pl. 14 (Ambelokipi); Polykleitos' *Diskophoros*: see n. 2 (Paris, Louvre); Polykleitos' *Diadoumenos*: Zanker 1974, pl. 11, 2–3 (Rome, Museo Archeologico Nazionale); 5–6 (Paris, Cabinet des Medailles); *Ephesian Amazon*: Arheid and Iozzo 2015, 140–2, cat. 111 (Florence, Museo Archeologico); Lysippos' 'Weary Herakles': Rolley 1999, 335–6, fig. 348 (Paris, Louvre); Daehner and Lapatin 2015, 218–19, no. 16 (Chieti, Museo Archeologico Nazionale); the Demosthenes of Polyuektos: Stähli 2014, 142–3, figs. 6.7.a–d (Harvard Art Museums, Arthur M. Sackler Museum).

of verses to accompany *apophoreta* (special gifts to be carried away) Martial even includes an epigram on a *Sauroctonus Corinthius*—a Corinthian (bronze) of ‘The Lizard Slayer’, a famous life-size bronze statue of Apollo by Praxiteles (Martial, 14.172). Should we consider that these miniature bronzes were intended and received as ‘copies’, of the sort we are used to identifying in measure-for-measure marble versions?⁶⁶

Or are some of these figurines pieces that might well have been sold to Roman collectors at a premium—as fifth- or fourth-century-BCE creations—made in the workshops of the well-known Classical sculptors responsible for the famous large-scale masterpieces? Might these bronzes, in fact, have been presented to prospective purchasers as the exquisite original models or prototypes for celebrated sculptures? Models made by the masters’ own hands—in preparation for the full-scale versions? That this was indeed how some small statuettes in precious materials were regarded by their owners seems to be confirmed by an observation in another one of Statius’ poems. The poet gives us an account of his encounter with the art collection of Manilius Vopiscus, during a visit to Vopiscus’ sumptuous villa near Tivoli (*Silvae* 1.3.47–51):

*Vidi artes veterumque manus variisque metalla
viva modis. Labor est auri memorare figuras
aut ebur aut dignas digitis contingere gemmas;
quicquid et argento primum vel in aere minori
lusit et enormes manus est experta colossos.*

I saw works of art, the authentic creations (*manus*) of old masters, and metals made living in diverse ways. It would be a mighty task to enumerate all the figures of gold or ivory or gems worthy of adorning fingers; *whatever in silver or in small-scale bronze the hand of sculptors had first playfully essayed, and tried out for enormous colossi.*

That the ‘preliminary sketches’ of works by famous artists were indeed highly valued by Roman collectors is confirmed by a passage of Petronius’ *Satyricon*. Encolpius, the story’s protagonist, enters a Campanian picture gallery, and describes his reaction to the works he sees there: ‘And I even examined, not without a certain thrill (*horror*), some preliminary sketches (*rudimentia*) by Protogenes, which vied with the truth of nature herself.’⁶⁷ The exaggerated

⁶⁶ That is the conclusion of Mastrorosa, for example—at least with respect to the statuette of Herakles Epitrapezios belonging to Novius Vindex, despite its inscription: Mastrorosa 2015, 107; Koortbojian 2015, 52 entertains a similar view: ‘Were the poets’ assertions of the statuette’s illustrious pedigree nothing more than learned acknowledgments that Vindex’ small bronze was intended to evoke its celebrated exemplar?’

⁶⁷ Petronius, *Satyricon*, 83: ‘*et Protogenes rudimentia cum ipsius naturae veritate certantia non sine quodam horrore tractavi.*’

reactions of the connoisseur, to ‘autograph works’ of an old master painter, are here parodied—by being put in the mouth of the feckless vagabond Encolpius.

C. Verres, when ‘asked’ for his collection of Corinthian bronzes by Mark Antony in 43 BCE, refused to hand them over—and reportedly went to his death rather than willingly surrender them (Pliny, *HN* 34.6). If the anecdote is true, he is the only art collector known to have died rather than give up his collection. He evidently did not suppose he had amassed a set of contemporary small-scale ‘modern reproductions.’⁶⁸ Varro even believed he owned a bronze statuette by the legendary fifth-century BCE silversmith Mentor—who made only four pairs of chased cups, reputedly the finest chased silverware ever made, none of which survived in Pliny’s time (Pliny, *HN* 33.155). What made Varro believe this? An art dealer’s story? Or a signature like the one on Vindex’ Herakles?⁶⁹

Of course, there are many more examples of statuettes in ‘good’ Classical style where we are not able to identify a secure *opus nobile*, known in an extensive replica series, behind the design (e.g., Figs. 1.1–1.2). How are we to imagine these works were described when they were sold on the Roman art market? In a passage of his surviving animal fables, Phaedrus—a freedman of Augustus, and a contemporary of the emperor Tiberius—says that he attaches the name ‘Aesop’ to his stories in order to give them greater authority; and he continues (Phaed. 5 praef.4–9):

*ut quidam artifices nostro faciunt saeculo,
qui pretium operibus maius inveniunt novis
si marmori adscripserunt Praxitelen suo,
detrito Myn argento, tabulae Zeuxidem.
adeo fucatae plus vetustati favet
Invidia mordax quam bonis praesentis.*

Just as some craftsmen of our time do, who get a greater price for their works if they inscribe on a marble statue ‘Praxiteles’, or on some polished silver ‘Mys’, or on a panel painting, ‘Zeuxis’. To such an extent does carping envy favor *counterfeit age* over contemporary talents.

⁶⁸ Suetonius records that during the proscriptions a graffito was written on the base of one of Octavian’s statues (*Aug.* 70.2): *pater argentarius, ego Corinthiarus*—‘My father was a dealer in silver, I in Corinthian bronzes.’ As Suetonius goes on to note, this refers to the strong suspicion at the time that many men had been included among the proscribed solely because of their valuable collections of antique bronzes.

⁶⁹ It is noteworthy that Statius praises Vindex as a man able to name the artist of works that are unsigned: *Silvae*, 4.6.22–4: *quis namque oculis certaverit usquam/Vindicis artificum veteres agnoscere ductus/et non inscriptis auctorem reddere signis?*—‘For whoever could rival Vindex’ eyes in recognizing the hands of old masters and restoring its maker to an un-inscribed statue?’ The implication is that Vindex believes he can tell the (celebrated) sculptor who made the pieces in his collection even when there is no signature to help him. Statius is recounting a long night of discussions about art while Vindex showed him his prize possessions. It is surely significant that the only sculptors mentioned are Myron, Praxiteles, Pheidias, and Polykleitos.

This at least might suggest that the name 'Lysippos' attached to the base of Novius Vindex' Hercules was applied not by the owner himself, but by the sculptor or dealer who sold it to him.⁷⁰

It often seems to be assumed that—beyond looting—the sole response of the ancient art market to the Roman elite's enthusiasm for the *antiqui* (the Greek old masters) was 'the copying industry': an extensive series of workshops in Rome and the Greek East specializing in the provision of many different kinds of artistic reproduction. But a large market for replicas (or versions) of various kinds—at various scales, and in various materials—can undoubtedly coexist with a powerful desire, on the part of individual wealthy collectors, to own genuine antiques: that is, 'autograph' works by the most admired Classical Greek artists. The prominence and notoriety of 'Corinthian bronzes' in elite culture during the late Republic and early Empire is arguably our best evidence for the widespread existence of such a desire, and for the efforts made to satisfy it by contemporary artists and dealers.⁷¹

'Corinthia' as exceptionally high-quality votives of the Roman period

But I want to end on a positive rather than a negative note. I said at the outset that the new kind of large, exquisitely worked bronze statuette that appears sometime in the late second and early first centuries BC is not really a votive; it is more an *objet d'art*—a collector's item, created for wealthy members of the Roman elite. But, of course, such a work could itself become a precious dedication—set up as a lavish offering in a temple or a temple treasury. In fact, we have several such statuettes, miniature monuments in their own right, that seem to have been placed as votives in ancient temples. For example, a partly hollow-cast statuette of the weary Herakles, of superb quality, only 36 cm in height, was found in the country shrine of *Hercules Curinus* (*Quirinus*) near Sulmona in central Italy, displayed

⁷⁰ In the case of Novius Vindex' Hercules only the base with the inscription is explicitly named as an indicator of the statuette's authenticity—as an original by the hand of Lysippos. But the passage of Phaedrus explicitly speaks of 'counterfeit age' (*fucatae... vetustati*) as one of the familiar 'tricks of the trade' of the forger. For an excellent discussion of the various techniques of producing an artificial appearance of great age, employed in the ancient book trade, see chapter 2 in this volume (by Howley), pp. 93–120, esp. pp. 108–11.

⁷¹ On the well-documented coexistence of a wide range of different kinds of artistic production—copying, repair, extensive restoration, and outright forgery—in eighteenth-century Italy, see chapter 11 in this volume (by Elizabeth Bartman): esp. p. 310: 'Whenever demand outstrips supply in a "hot" market, an opening is created for fraud' (pp. 308–33). Bartman's judicious and balanced account of the behavior and motivations of English aristocratic collectors and Italian restorers in early modern Rome offers valuable insights for anyone attempting to understand the origins and development of the ancient art market that came into being to serve the Roman elite in the late second and early first centuries BCE.

clamped to the top of a small column (compare the ‘Corinthian bronze’ in Fig. 1.18).⁷² It possesses its own circular bronze base, on which was placed a votive inscription inlaid in silver: M. ATTIUS PETICIUS MARSUS V[otum] S[olvit] L[ibens] M[erito], ‘Marcus Attius Peticius Marsus performed his vow willingly as merited’. Another such example is the bronze athlete pouring a libation from the collection of Shelby White and Leon Levy, which has lost its base, but which has a dedicatory inscription written in Greek scratched on its thigh, explaining that it was set up by Publios Achaikos in fulfillment of a vow.⁷³

Literary evidence suggests that the dedication of the new kind of statuettes as especially impressive votives begins quite early. We learn that Cicero kept in his residence in Rome a little statue (referred to by Dio Cassius as an ἀγαλμάτιον) of the goddess Minerva that he especially venerated. When he was forced to go into exile by Clodius in 58 BC, before his departure Cicero staged a kind of public ceremony, carrying his own personal image of the goddess from his house to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, setting it up there as a votive with the inscription ‘Guardian of the City’ (*Custos Urbis*).⁷⁴ Cicero himself reports that some time later the little statue was blown down in a storm, and then re-erected by decree of the Senate (Cicero, *ad Fam.* 12.25.1). Much later we hear of Pliny the Younger planning to set up a statuette that he explicitly refers to as a ‘Corinthian bronze’ as a votive to Jupiter in his hometown (Pliny, *Epist.* 3.6). Pliny has bought the figure, ‘not a very big one’ (*modicum*), with a legacy he has received. It was evidently sold to him as a genuine antique. But Pliny says he does not want it for himself. Instead, he has purchased it specifically to serve as a votive. And the ostensible purpose of the letter he writes is to order an inscribed marble base for it that will carry his name as dedicator. So this ‘Corinthian bronze’ will, just like Cicero’s Minerva, henceforth be a fixed dedication in a sanctuary, like the old-fashioned votives of the Greek world.

Pliny offers quite a full description of his purchase, which is worth considering in some detail (Pliny, *Epist.* 3.6.2 to 3.6.4):

⁷² Daehner and Lapatin 2015, 218–19, no. 16 (with earlier bibliography).

⁷³ Kozloff and Mitten 1988, 316–19, no. 59 (J. J. Herrmann); von Bothmer 1990, 244, no. 177. The statuette is 22 cm in height, the arms cast separately, and has silvered eyes; the irises were once inlaid, but are now missing. It probably once held a silver *phiale* (libation bowl) in the extended right hand, and a silver *oinochoe* (water jug) in the left. The inscription reads: ΠΟΥΒΑΙΣ ΑΧΑΕΙΚΟΣ ΕΙΕΑΜΕΝΟΙ ΑΝΕΘΗΚΑΝ. ‘Publi[o]s Achaikos, having made a vow, dedicated [this]’.

⁷⁴ Plutarch, *Cic.* 31; Dio Cass. 38.17; Cicero, *de leg.* 2.42. The material of the figure is never specified by our sources, but the description of Cicero carrying it to the Capitol (*κομίσας; detulimus*) makes it likely to have been a small bronze. Explicitly named by Cicero as ‘Guardian of the City’, it was probably an *Athena Promachos*, like for example the statuette in Archaic style in the Getty (see n. 2): von Hesberg 1998, 370–8. On this whole episode, see Bodet 2008, 252–5. For two comparable cases of later Romans possessing statuettes of divinities that they specially venerated among their household gods: (1) the emperor Domitian had a statuette of Minerva that he kept with his Lares: Cassius Dio, 67.16.1; (2) Vespasian had a statuette of Fortuna at his villa in Tusculum; Suetonius, *Galba*, 4.3.



Fig. 1.25 Old Shepherd with lamb and sheepdog, set on a decorated bronze base; from the sanctuary at Ampelokipi, Greece; bronze statuette, partly hollow cast. First century CE. H: 50 cm. Athens, National Museum, inv. X 16789.

hoc tamen signum ego quoque intellego. Est enim nudum, nec aut vitia si qua sunt celat, aut laudes parum ostentat. Effingit senem stantem; ossa musculi nervi, venae rugae etiam ut spirantis adparent; rari et cedentes capilli, lata frons, contracta facies, exile collum; pendent lacerti, papillae iacent, venter recessit; a tergo quoque eadem aetas ut a tergo. Aes ipsum, quantum verus color indicat, vetus et antiquum; talia denique omnia, ut possint artificum oculos tenere, delectare imperitorum. Quod me quanquam tirunculum sollicitavit ad emendum.

But this is a statue that I feel even I can appreciate, for being nude it does not hide any defects it may have, nor fail to reveal its merits. It represents a standing figure of an old man; the bones, muscles, sinews, and veins—and even the wrinkles—are clear and lifelike, the hair is sparse and receding from a broad brow, its face is lined and its neck thin; it has drooping shoulders, a flat chest, and hollow stomach. The back view, within its limits, gives the same impression of age. The bronze appears to have the true color of a genuine antique; in fact every detail is such as to hold the attention of an artist as well as delight the amateur, and that is what persuaded me to buy it, novice though I am.

Pliny's description leaves us in no doubt that it was what we would call a genre figure, probably a peasant—perhaps a shepherd or fisherman. One may compare the superb statuette of a (clothed) shepherd found at Ambelokipi in Athens (Fig. 1.25).⁷⁵ Though for the sort of nude elderly figure that Pliny is describing, the marble statue of an old fisherman from the Hadrianic Baths at Aphrodisias probably makes a better comparison.⁷⁶ Remarkably, Pliny doesn't say what sort of person the old man is meant to represent. For those who believe that Romans, as patrons of art, were concerned primarily with the subject represented—the 'content' of a work—this may seem surprising. For Pliny's letter makes it clear, he admires the statuette because it is a riveting work of art, and a genuine antique (though he is less sure about its age; he just says it has the 'true color' or patina of an antique).⁷⁷ In Pliny's view it is a fitting dedication to be set up in the local temple of Jupiter (or perhaps in some other public place)—not so much because

⁷⁵ Krystalle-Votse 2014, 74–80, pls. 17–18. The shepherd shows all the characteristic features of a Corinthian bronze: it is hollow-cast in (at least) two sections; the figure has a silver strap to his satchel, and a very fine meander pattern on his (unusual) bronze base was probably also inlaid in silver. This makes it likely that the whites of the eyes were once also silvered. Krystalle-Votse suggests that the large cache of seventeen statuettes to which the shepherd belongs either comes from a Roman villa, or from a bronze workshop: *ibid.*, 115.

⁷⁶ Smith 1996, 58–61, esp. figs. 57–60. The statue was probably a monument that was famous locally: a small-scale (marble) version of this figure was also found in the city: *ibid.*, fig. 60. See also Smith 1998, 253–8.

⁷⁷ On the difficulty for elite purchasers of being able to judge whether manufactured objects, such as ancient bookrolls, were genuinely old/antique (*vetustas*), see also Joseph Howley's chapter, 2, in this volume.

of its subject, but because of its *aesthetic impact*: its *brilliance*, its *quality*.⁷⁸ One might say the same for the remarkable Ambelokipi shepherd.

These two cases—statuettes belonging to Cicero and to Pliny the Younger, both ending up dedicated in sanctuaries—provide us with a salutary reminder that not all those who possessed 'Corinthian bronzes' thought of them first and foremost as 'art objects', as C. Verres and Novius Vindex apparently did. Such figures were just as likely valued as objects of veneration, like Cicero's Minerva or the 'Wearied Herakles' from the sanctuary of *Hercules Curinus* in Sulmona; or were prized as especially suitable gifts for the gods, like Pliny's 'naked old man' or Publios Achaikos' athlete.

Conclusion: What were Corinthian bronzes?

According to the arguments I have presented in this chapter, Corinthian bronzes were a 'category of collectible' that, in our terms, comprised several sets of prestige objects. These may conveniently be listed: (1) genuine antique bronze vessels of various kinds, with or without figural decoration (e.g., Fig. 1.8); (2) if we follow the attractive suggestion of Emanuele, small figures removed from such vessels, or from other luxury furnishings, such as candelabra (e.g., Fig. 1.12); (3) very fine antique bronze statuettes from other sources (such as, e.g., Fig. 1.3, and those listed in n. 35), removed from sanctuaries and perhaps fitted with new bases, to make them portable; and finally (4) newly made bronze statuettes, of a size and exquisite workmanship unknown in earlier centuries, intended specifically for wealthy Roman collectors (e.g., Figs. 1.1–1.2, 1.4–1.5). Given the prices that collectors were prepared to pay for them, this latter category of bronzes probably also included examples that could be sold, fraudulently, as valuable antiques; that is, as precious works by the hand of the great sculptor whose *workshop* created the well-known full-size version of the statue.

In fact, once one starts looking, there is a lot of surviving evidence to flesh out our picture of this composite category of late Hellenistic bronzework. For example, *vasa Corinthia* appear quite often in Roman wall-painting (e.g., Figs. 1.9–1.10); sometimes Corinthian candelabra too (e.g., Fig. 1.11). In this chapter, however, I have concentrated on the bronze figurines that loom so large in our literary sources, and especially on examples of the genre that I suspect were made specially for the Roman art market. I have argued that we possess archaeological evidence for the creation of these 'collector's items'—notably the statuettes from

⁷⁸ The workmanship, we are told, will impress even *artists*. Pliny describes it as *festivum et expressum*—'delightful/charming' and 'highly expressive/vivid': Pliny, *Epist.* 3.6.1. For an entirely different interpretation of Pliny's reticence—why he is not explicit as to what sort of person the bronze statuette represents—see Henderson 2002, *passim*.



Fig. 1.26 Heavily draped and veiled woman, dancing. First century B.C.E. H: 20.5 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 1972.118.95. Photo credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Walter C. Baker, 1971



Fig. 1.27 Enthroned Zeus/Jupiter, probably from Hungary. First century CE.
H: 17.8 cm. London British Museum inv. 1865,0103.36. Photo credit: © The Trustees
of the British Museum

the Antikythera shipwreck (e.g., Figs. 1.16–1.17); and that we also have Corinthian bronze figurines represented in wall-painting (Figs. 1.18, 1.22) and perhaps in other media too (Fig. 1.13). Unquestionably the best indicators of the emergence of this ‘category of collectible’, however, are the specially created bases, of stone and of bronze, that set these figurines apart from earlier small bronzes, and make them truly portable (Figs. 1.4–1.5, 1.19–1.20, 1.22–1.23).⁷⁹ And the elaborate decoration of such bases, with silver and copper inlay (Figs. 1.5, 1.23), is one of the clearest signs of the high aesthetic pretensions of these statuettes, as choice artworks in their own day.

If I am right, there are many of these newly made ‘Corinthian bronzes’ to be found in our museum collections. Statuettes of such exceptional quality that—whether they were fraudulently traded as ‘antiques’ in the Roman period or not—it is about time they were written back into our histories of Roman art in the first century BCE (e.g., Figs. 1.26–1.27). When I consider the meager scraps of low-quality historical relief that normally constitute the most important art-historical material in our accounts of the art of the late Republic—these bronzes are a revelation. It is my belief that these statuettes represent some of the very finest works to have survived from this period—or for that matter from *any* period of ancient art. Despite their small scale they appear to constitute major artworks in their own right, whether or not they were sold as fifth- and fourth-century-BCE originals with false signatures inscribed on their bases (as I suspect more than a few of them probably were). It is at least possible that in the late Republic the greatest artworks produced—creations of the very best contemporary artists—may have been, in our terms, forgeries. That is, works in earlier styles, passed off to Roman collectors as the authentic handiwork of the great artists of earlier periods. But might not a forgery *still* be a great work of art? When I consider the small selection of little bronzes I have illustrated in this chapter (Figs. 1.1–1.2, 1.4–1.5, 1.12, 1.14–1.17, 1.19–1.20, 1.23, 1.25–27) then I am rather inclined to answer—yes. Yes it might.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Though of course genuine antiques could easily be fitted with such bases, once they entered the Roman art market. There is no guarantee that the bases of statuettes are always contemporary with the bronzes they support.

⁸⁰ The existing scholarship on forgery, whether in the realm of literature or the visual arts, appears to take it for granted—almost as an article of faith—that forgeries can in themselves possess little or no aesthetic value. Compare, for example, Grafton 1990. Once a work is definitively exposed as a forgery (of a later period), it is generally regarded as aesthetically as well as historically valueless. (This partly explains the remarkable reluctance on the part of art historians to consider the possibility that forgeries were produced at all in the ancient world.) In the face of this seemingly universal assumption it seems crucial here to assert the extraordinary quality and artistic brilliance of the category of bronzes discussed in this chapter. In terms of their workmanship, they are far too good to belong to the stylistic periods to which they at first sight appear to belong (sixth, fifth, fourth centuries BCE); but this should not blind us to the fact that, viewed as works of the first century BCE or first century CE, they remain what they were always intended to be: ‘miniature masterpieces’.