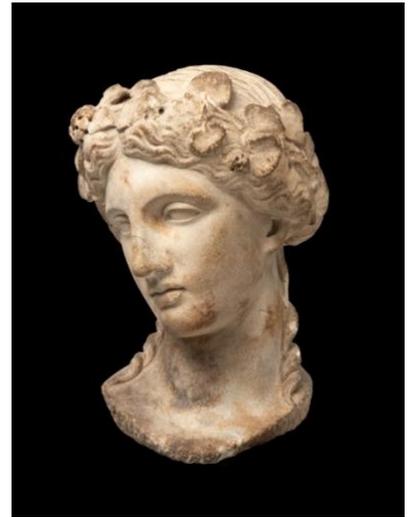


Marble Head of Dionysos Crowned with Ivy Wreath

Roman Imperial, Hadrianic, 1st half of 2nd century AD
After an early 4th century BC, Late Classical Greek Archetype
Total height: 33 cm (13 in), Height of face: 16.5 cm (6.5 in)

Provenance

Acquired by Mr Clinton Gilbert from the Kalebdjian Frères, Paris, on May 1, 1923;
By succession to his widow Mrs Magdalene Lydia Gilbert, 1924;
By succession to her son Mr Dexter Spear French, 1951;
By succession to his wife Mrs Donna Gould, Naples, New York, 1994.



The Armenian-born Kalebdjian Brothers were major players in the modern antiquities art market from its inception. Around the turn of the 20th century, they opened shop in Cairo, then in 1905, in Paris at 12, Rue de la Paix, where they cultivated the distinguished Place Vendôme clientele. They furnished facing neighbor, Louis Cartier, with many important pieces that inspired his jewelry creations.¹ Already in 1903, The British Museum was purchasing from The Brothers and today, Kalebdjian-provenanced, important pieces are in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Louvre, Musée du quai Branly, Smithsonian Institution and University of Pennsylvania to name a few.² The auction *Egyptian, Western Asiatic, Greek, Etruscan, Roman Antiquities & Other Works of Art: From the Collection of the Late Nichan Kalebdjian*,³ held in 1969 at Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, added to the roster of objects in the market from the glamorous dealership.⁴ Important examples include the imposing marbles from the Henry de Montherlant Collection, offered in 2017, and a

¹ For a riveting account of the Bothers' dealings with Cartier: Nadelhoffer, Hans. 2008. *Cartier*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

https://books.google.com/books?id=xnKpjh1gkqgC&pg=PA146&lpg=PA146&dq=kalebdjian&source=bl&ots=MqeOL6QmT6&sig=ACU3U3wiVct-hGEoGPFwpRQ5li7LIWd6Q&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEWj84Z73y_TjAhUyw1kKHQILB2I4ChDoATABegQIBxAB#v=onepage&q=kalebdjian&f=false

² "Pottery Wine-Jar Of Nedjmet". 2019. *Britishmuseum.Org*.

https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=119851&partId=1&searchText=59774&page=1

"Trial Piece with Relief of Head of Akhenaten". 2019. *Metmuseum.Org*.
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/545909>

³ Parke-Bernet Galleries. 1969. *Egyptian, Western Asiatic, Greek, Etruscan, Roman antiquities & other works of art: from the collection of the late Nichan Kalebdjian : public auction, May 24 [1969] Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York*. New York: The Galleries.

⁴ Photograph of Nichan Kalebdjian in Haï Guiank, the only Parisian Armenian Newspaper in 1931:

[http://tert.nla.am/archive/NLA%20AMSAGIR/Haykeang%20Pariz/1931\(5\).pdf](http://tert.nla.am/archive/NLA%20AMSAGIR/Haykeang%20Pariz/1931(5).pdf)

The Brothers held an important ancient jewelry exhibit with 147 pieces, 1913-1914. *Collection Kalebdjian: exposition de bijoux antiques*, which produced a catalog proclaiming that "Today fashion decrees that the elegant Parisienne should wear ancient jewelry: and not merely stale imitations, but the very jewels themselves that once adorned the bosom of an Egyptian queen or a Greek empress." It followed an important Cartier exhibit that same year featuring Egyptianized pieces incorporating an ancient lotus pendant and a turquoise amulet.

precious intaglio gem featured at Christie's New York, April 2019.⁵

Mr Clinton Gilbert was a successful Wall Street broker who belonged to many upscale clubs and lived on Fifth Avenue in New York.

Accompanying documents: Original 1923 invoice from *Kalebdjian Frères Antiquaires* addressed to Mr Clinton Gilbert. Estate appraisal of Paul H. Petersen, ESQ. & Mrs. Magdalene Lydia Petersen (formerly Gilbert), of Hadlyme, Connecticut, 1942.

Description

The fine-grained marble head depicts Dionysos, the ancient Greek god of wine, theater, and ecstatic revelry, who is represented absently gazing down, three-quarters to its proper right side. The oval visage with crisply delineated large eyes and arched brows has a long straight nose and small, parted mouth with fleshy lower lip. The centrally-parted voluminous coiffure is crowned by an ivy wreath with 22 heart-shaped leaves, two corymb berry clusters on top (one missing), and two more on the sides, closer to the ears, which are one quarter covered by backswept, thick locks of wavy hair. Behind, the strands are all gathered in a *krobylos*, where all the hair is looped from the nape up and from the front through a single or double fillet, *taenia*. This forms a distinctively shaped chignon that is often seen on Dionysos.⁶ In this case, one single corkscrew curl cascades down the length of the long neck on each side. The symmetrical features are emphasized by the central hair part and the resulting, perfectly V-shaped forehead. The eyelids are asymmetric, the left one - directly facing the spectator - is taller and projects much further out than the right one, creating an accent through the larger area catching the light. Throughout, the modeling is sensual and nuanced, with contrasting rhythms of serpentine hair and smooth, godly flesh.

Lot Essay

This sumptuous Dionysos head was carved for insertion into a separate body, which must have been clothed, sporting a *chlamys* or a V-neck garment that would allow for the seam. Since very little of the chest is included, a rather fully-clothed statue is to be presumed for the Greek archetype that engendered our piece. The best candidate is reflected in a 2nd century AD Roman statue of Dionysos in the Hermitage museum (ГР-3004), Russia, which presents the god in majesty - dressed in a short tunic and animal skin, holding a bunch of grapes in the elevated left hand and a pine-cone in the lowered right. He stands in heroic contrapposto next to an archaizing *Kore* caryatid figure.⁷ The Parthenon style, deeply carved drapery folds, frontal Polykleitan stance, crisp eyes and brows, and hairstyle all suggest a date very early in the

⁵ Henry de Motherlant (1895 - 1972) was a distinguished writer and member of the prestigious Académie française.

⁶ The best parallel to understand the hairstyle is the monumental Mondragone Head of Antinous as Dionysos, ca AD 130. In our example, the hair is pulled almost entirely through the fillets, which are not so clearly visible:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/57/Antinous_Mandragone_profil.jpg.

⁷ "Art Works". 2019. *Hermitagemuseum.Org*. https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/06.%20Sculpture/188668!/ut/p/z1/04_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfljo8zi_R0dzQyNnQ28_J1NXQwc_YMCTIOc_dwNDE30_w8EKDHAARwP9KGL041EQhd94LOIWAH1gVOTr7JuuH1WQWJKhm5mXlq8fYWcMpxCcXJpTUFJalKofYWhhYWZmAXRMFJpxnt7mQONCTD38_cOcjZxNoArwOKggNzSiysfDINNURUEAF93Gpg!/dz/d5/L2dBISevZ0FBIS9nQSEh/?lng=en.

4th century BC for the Greek original, when images of the god were just switching from bearded to unbearded, a development linked to his portrayal in the play *The Bacchae*.⁸

Of special interest to us are the corkscrew curls. Subsequent derivatives of the type display half-uncurled strands, as in the statue in Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Inv. No.: 2025,⁹ and fully uncurled without a chignon in the so-called *Hope Dionysos* in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. No. 1990.247.¹⁰ The corkscrew curls and the structured chignon in both the Hermitage and our piece are most faithful to the early 4th century BC original. They were leftover pictorial devices from the earlier Classical and Archaic periods which quickly vanished thereafter - the looser, often undone coiffure expressing the wild spirit of the rejuvenated god.¹¹

A Hadrianic date in first half of the 2nd century AD seems most probable for our head. After Emperor Hadrian's favorite, Antinous, mysteriously drowned in the Nile in AD 130, he was deified and became strongly associated with Osiris, the Egyptian god of resurrection and the afterlife, who in turn was associated with the Greek god Dionysos. The result was a proliferation of Antinous statues in the guise of the god, often colossal and sporting majestic ivy wreaths with corymbes in the same arrangement as in our piece.¹² These statues referenced the styles of classical Greece, which Hadrian – the *Greekling* – so dearly favored.¹³

The portraiture of empress Sabina also supports a Hadrianic date for our sculpture.¹⁴ Often depicted idealized with crisp eyes and centrally-parted hair, virtually identical to our Dionysos' in the front, images of Sabina were undoubtedly some of the most imposing and widely disseminated throughout the empire. Their influence, along with that of the Dionysian statues, must have peaked between Antinous' death in AD 130 and Hadrian's in AD 138.

⁸ Matheson, Susan B. 1995. *Polygnotos and vase painting in classical Athens*. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press. 187.

⁹ "Arachne - Individual Object 8475: Dionysos - Statue - Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek". 2019. *Arachne.Uni-Koeln.De*. [https://arachne.uni-koeln.de/arachne/index.php?view\[section\]=uebersicht&view\[layout\]=objekt_item&view\[caller\]\[project\]=&view\[page\]=217&view\[category\]=overview&search\[data\]=ALL&search\[mode\]=meta&search\[match\]=similar&view\[active_tab\]=overview&search\[constraints\]=Dionysos](https://arachne.uni-koeln.de/arachne/index.php?view[section]=uebersicht&view[layout]=objekt_item&view[caller][project]=&view[page]=217&view[category]=overview&search[data]=ALL&search[mode]=meta&search[match]=similar&view[active_tab]=overview&search[constraints]=Dionysos).

¹⁰ "Statue of Dionysos leaning on a female figure ("Hope Dionysos")". 2019. *Metmuseum.Org*. <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1990.247/>.

¹¹ Archaic: "CNG: Feature Auction Nomos 1. SICILY, Naxos. Circa 460. Tetradrachm (Silver, 17.33 G 1)". 2019. *Cngcoins.Com*. https://www.cngcoins.com/Bid.aspx?Item_ID=138589.

Hellenistic: "Drachm (?) Of Korkyra With Head Of Dionysos – Works – Museum Of Fine Arts, Boston". 2019. *Collections.Mfa.Org*. <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/1345>.

Black Figure: "File:Dionysos Thiasos Louvre MNE938.Jpg - Wikimedia Commons". 1998. *Commons.Wikimedia.Org*. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dionysos_thiasos_Louvre_MNE938.jpg.

Red Figure: "Dionysus, Ariadne & Eros - Ancient Greek Vase Painting". 2019. *Theoi.Com*. Accessed August 18 2019. <https://www.theoi.com/Gallery/K12.20.html>.

¹² "Korymbos (Corymbus) was the rustic demi-god (daimon) of the fruit of the ivy. His mother Mystis was a nurse of the god Dionysos on the island of Euboa (Euboea) and Korymbos was probably his cradle-mate."

Nonnus, W. H. D. Rouse, H. J. Rose, and L. R. Lind. 1940. *Dionysiaca*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. <https://www.theoi.com/Georgikos/Korymbos.html>.

¹³ "Antinous as Dionysos | Museum Of Classical Archaeology Databases". 2019. *Museum.Classics.Cam.Ac.Uk*. <https://museum.classics.cam.ac.uk/collections/casts/antinous-dionysos>.

¹⁴ "The Empress Sabina - The Collection - Museo Nacional Del Prado". 2019. *Museodelprado.Es*. <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-empress-sabina/099b42a1-afb4-44f9-bb5a-49107be77fc9>.

The empress' portraiture likely feminized the already feminine god even further, prompting Kalebdjian in 1923 to misidentify the head as that of a Bacchante. Bacchantes or maenads, the unhinged women-followers of Dionysos, normally do not display berry clusters in their ivy wreaths and their demeanor is wild. In antiquity, they were often represented with their heads thrown back in primal abandon.¹⁵ Ancient bacchantes are also not usually depicted with complex, delicate chignons, which would not hold up during their Dionysiac frenzies. Kalebdjian's claim to a Capadoccia, Turkey, findspot is supported by the extra popularity of the subject in Asia Minor – the birthplace of Antinous and where Dionysos spent a long sojourn before returning to Thebes and Mount Olympus.

Our head of Dionysos was probably commissioned for a cult statue that stood in majesty in a public or private temple, such as the ones in Hadrian's villa at Tivoli. The fine-grained marble and the quality of the carving convey the importance of this masterpiece commission, which celebrates the beauty and grace of Classical Greek art in Roman times.¹⁶ Works like this would inspire another wave of Greek classicism in the 18th and 19th centuries in the art of Antonio Canova and his Neoclassical contemporaries.

Condition Report

Stable and in good condition. Proper left, top berry cluster missing with two drill holes from it still visible. Losses to five leaves on the left and to two on the right side of the wreath. Tip of the nose and sliver of the left earlobe visibly restored in marble; right ear slightly chipped. Corner of the left lower lip and section of the left corkscrew curl visibly filled in with gesso. 2 ½ inch wide chunk of marble broken off and reattached along the bottom in the middle in front with hairline seam visible. 4 ½ inch wide chunk of marble broken off and missing below the nape of the neck. Stable two-inch fissure above the nape, next to two superficial scratches; small flaw cavity in the middle of the hair bun on top. Areas of reddish patina deposits throughout, darker below the chin both in front and back.

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¹⁵ The corymbs are most often reserved for Dionysos and occasionally for Silenus, the god's foster parent. They function as focal points in a crown, as in the majestic example found in Macedonia in the 4th century BC:

<https://theancientworld.tumblr.com/post/3621749723/ancient-greek-golden-ivy-wreath-mid-4th-c-bce>

<https://archaicwonder.tumblr.com/post/82424056759/gold-ivy-and-fruit-wreath-found-in-chalkidike>.

Rococo Bacchantes in the 18th century particularly take on the corymbs in garland-like arrangements similar to those worn by the goddess Flora, muses, and nymphs.

¹⁶ The statue of Dionysos in Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. Inv. no.: 526, though bare chested, gives a good idea of how graceful our head looked on a body:

"Arachne - Individual Object 8474: Statue Des Dionysos - Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek". 2019. *Arachne.Uni-Koeln.De*.

Accessed August 18 2019. [https://arachne.uni-](https://arachne.uni-koeln.de/arachne/index.php?view[section]=uebersicht&view[layout]=objekt_item&view[caller][project]=&view[page]=216&view[category]=overview&search[data]=ALL&search[mode]=meta&search[match]=similar&view[active_tab]=overview&search[constraints]=dionysos)

[koeln.de/arachne/index.php?view\[section\]=uebersicht&view\[layout\]=objekt_item&view\[caller\]\[project\]=&view\[page\]=216&view\[category\]=overview&search\[data\]=ALL&search\[mode\]=meta&search\[match\]=similar&view\[active_tab\]=overview&search\[constraints\]=dionysos](https://arachne.uni-koeln.de/arachne/index.php?view[section]=uebersicht&view[layout]=objekt_item&view[caller][project]=&view[page]=216&view[category]=overview&search[data]=ALL&search[mode]=meta&search[match]=similar&view[active_tab]=overview&search[constraints]=dionysos).