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Author: Anna Anguissola
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Marks of Imitation or Signs of Originality? An Approach to Structural Supports in Roman Marble Statuary

Anna Anguissola

Introduction

In 1933, the Metropolitan Museum of Art announced the purchase of a Roman marble copy of the Diadoumenos of Polykleitos, a work that counted among the most highly considered masterpieces of antiquity (Fig. 1). Dating varies from the Flavian to the Antonine age, but the statue should probably be assigned to the last quarter of the first century A.D. (Richter 1935 and 1954: 30–32 no. 38; Kreikenbom 1990: 188 no. V.2). Unfortunately, the fillet-binder was in a much poorer state of preservation than what we see today. The missing torso and the upper part of the legs had to be replaced by plaster casts taken from a Hellenistic replica of the same statue type, found in Delos (Fig. 2), dated to the turn of the second to first century B.C. (Kreikenbom 1990: 188 no. V.1). Although about two centuries separate the two sculptures, they share dimensions to the point that the patchwork proves perfectly consistent.

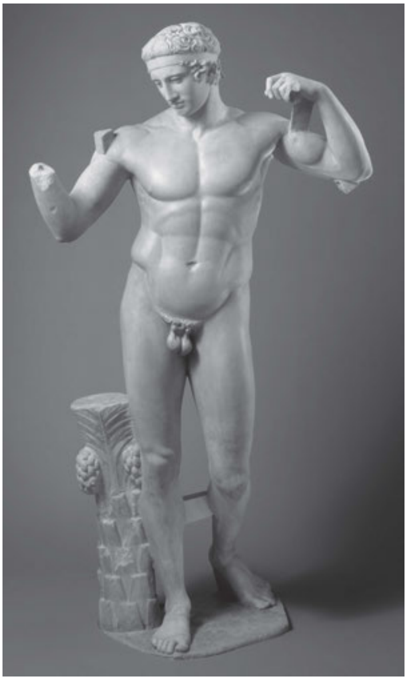

Figure 1: Replica of the Diadoumenos of Polykleitos, restored with casts of the Delos Diadoumenos. New York, Metropolitan Museum (Photo ARTstor)

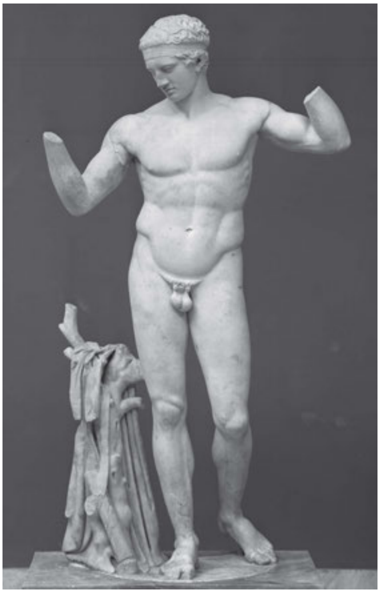

Figure 2: Replica of the Diadoumenos of Polykleitos, from Delos. Athens, National Archaeological Museum (Photo DAI-Athens)

Few other examples show as clearly how the image of Classical Greek works of art could persist unchanged for centuries after their original, which, in this case, goes back to the second half of the fifth century B.C. Despite their striking similarity in size and proportion, the New York and Athens Diadoumenoi differ in a detail that should not pass unnoticed. The former bears the traces of many heavy supports that joined the left hand to the shoulder, both elbows to the body, the right shoulder to the right hand or fillet, and the two legs. On the one hand, the fact that the dimensions (and weight) coincide with the Athenian marble, which is entirely preserved until nowadays with only a tiny strut under the left foot, rules out static constraints. On the other hand, the quality of the New York Diadoumenos is such that we can hardly blame the copyist's lack of skill. Apparently, contemporary viewers were not as disturbed by these obtrusive additions as we are. Nor were the buyers of other overly-supported marbles, like the beautiful copy of Myron's Diskobolos from Castel Porziano (Fig. 3), with a long joint between the right hip and the right wrist or hand (Anguissola 2005: 319–320 no. 2), or the copy of the Apoxyomenos by Lysippos, found in Trastevere and exhibited now in the Vatican Museums (Moreno 1995: 197–205; below, Fig. 12).

This poses a radical challenge to our ideas on the taste and visual practices beneath the success of copies. For a long time, it has been considered that structural supports in Roman marble sculpture certify the translation of the less heavy Greek bronze originals into Roman marble copies and denote the superiority of the former to the latter. Of course, struts served the practical purpose of stabilizing marble sculptures. As these few examples show, however, the presence of supports seems to betray a far more complex interaction between images and the sculptor's own interpretation. The elegance that such details reveal in a number of sculptures of overall high quality hints to the possibility that they were decorative elements in their own right, meant to enhance appreciation of the artist's skills.

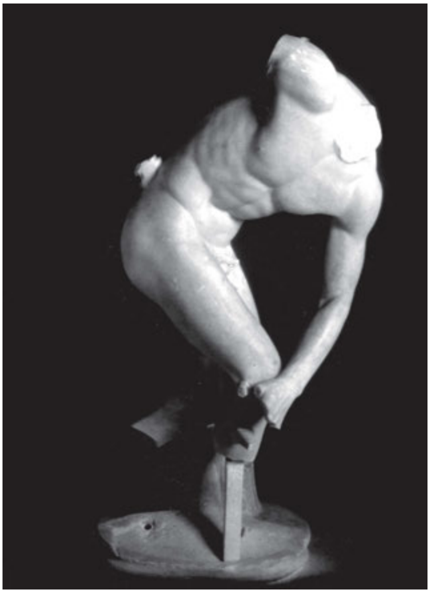

Figure 3: Copy of the Diskobolos of Myron, from Castel Porziano. Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano (Photo Museo Nazionale Romano)

The culture of copying

It is clear that this line of thought and its implications challenge at its roots the current trend of seeing 'true copies' – intended, manufactured, and displayed to establish a clear link to a given Greek masterpiece – as a marginal phenomenon of Roman art. According to today's prevailing view, this class of items was produced, traded, and purchased principally to become part of larger sculptural settings in public and private buildings, like some sort of conventional furniture (for a summary of recent research on Roman copies *cf.* Anguissola 2012b). As such, 'true copies' of ancient Greek masterpieces must have enjoyed far less consideration than 'free emulations' based on the styles of the ancient Greek masters. Certainly, the idea of 'Roman copies after Greek originals', as posed by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art historians, revolves around a simplistic view of the relationship between Greek and Roman cultures and fails to account for the pervasive retrospection that permeated Roman art at every level. Today, we agree that the post-Enlightenment notion of artistic genius, as well as the modern familiarity with a canon of masterpieces, should not be arbitrarily imputed to the Romans, whose appropriation of Greek art operated within a living tradition and in an evolving visual code.

With this said, however, the frame within which we read imitation in the Roman visual arts should not, in the name of a search for originality, neglect to account for the spread and success of 'true copies'. If the capacity to vary on a given repertoire was a much-esteemed quality for rhetoricians, poets, and artists alike, the skill to reproduce an illustrious prototype with exactitude was by no means discredited in workshops' practice and criticism, even in the eyes of skilled viewers (Anguissola 2012a: 54, 71–72, 75, 125, 145, 173; *cf.* also Hallett 2005). Within Roman visual culture both 'real copies' and 'free emulations' held a central role in collective imagery, everyday practice, and art criticism (Kousser 2008: 150). However wrong-footing this may be to the modern preference for entirely new and completely inventive works of art, for the Romans it seems to have been important to recognize particular objects as repetitions of famous Greek originals.As a consequence of diverse demands, the ubiquity of repeated images (both in the forms of replica series and widespread iconographies) invites different responses from scholars. The main challenge, in this sense, is to distinguish the retention of forms (that is, the *attention*) from their elaboration (that is, the *intention* behind a re-use), and requires a plurality of categories (*cf.* the 'forms of attention' described by Koortbojian 2002). There is little doubt that the intention beyond imitation was often 'contextual', aimed at new compositions – either eclectic pastiches mixing features and styles into new individual figures, or whole landscapes crowded with images (among which 'true copies') combined to articulate a certain message. Elsewhere, objects were copied precisely because of their form and intrinsic semantics; the ease in recognizing the prototype remained essential, while accommodating diverse requirements with regard to outward faithfulness.

Disfiguring additions?

In this perspective, the study of structural supports contributes to the effort of understanding how copies were produced, viewed, and judged in relationship to their prototype and to one another. To do so, it is necessary to start by defining the object of our analysis and its place within the scholarly debate and the history of the discipline.

A support is a mass of stone left in place to fortify a fragile point of a statue. Attributes such as tree stumps, vases, animals, weapons, and ancillary figures often served as supports. Besides, in most Roman statues, one or more nonrepresentational struts contribute to stabilizing the figure by linking volumes and projections. The deep-rooted idea that struts are essentially a Roman invention should be discarded. Although the original Greek sculpture known to us includes a comparatively scanty number of freestanding marble statues, supports are well attested from the archaic times onward (for instance, in archaic *kouroi* and, most notably, in the fourth-century B.C. statues of the *Daochos* dedication at Delphi, as noted by Hollinshead 2002: 122–126; more recently on supports in Greek statuary see Weinstock 2012, which appeared in print when the definitive version of this article had already been submitted). Nonetheless, it is certainly true that struts became a hallmark of Roman marble statuary and that by the second century A.D. they must have been something highly familiar to the Roman observer.

Already in the late eighteenth century, Ennio Quirino Visconti conjectured that extrinsic elements were peculiar to Roman marble copies of Greek bronze originals, required by the necessity of reproducing their poses in heavy stone (1782–1796, III: 65). This has remained common opinion ever since, leading to the conclusion that supports invariably signal derivation and inadequacy. Especially non-figural struts, whose number, dimensions, and visibility defy our aesthetic conventions, have prompted an array of negative judgments as disfiguring additions (as shown by Hollinshead 2002: 117). This modern bias has deeply affected how information about Roman sculpture is presented up to our day. Pictures in museum catalogues still tend to show as little as possible of the supports. Similarly, broken-off stubs have often been skilfully erased from the plaster casts of Greek and Roman artworks. Besides, the assumption that supports were considered unsightly by the Romans themselves and had to be accurately hidden has led to questionable conclusions about the display context of many statues (such as the Hermes sandal-binder from Perge and the Conservatori charioteer, for both of which the original position has generally been assessed with an eye to obscuring their struts, as stressed by Hollinshead 2002: 118 note 3).

Scholars have often yet cursorily engaged in the task of accounting for the function of shafts, bars, and connectors in Roman sculpture, wavering between two main explanations. Firstly, that struts allowed translating a lighter bronze prototype into heavy stone (most notably Andreae 1982: 176, 198; 1983: 50). Secondly, that they were securing appendages for transport and therefore evidence of importation (for instance, Lippold 1923: 43, 72–73, 134; Richter 1954: 31; more recently Slavazzi 1996: 140 about the copies of Greek masterpieces found in the *Narbonensis*). As a consequence, it has been assumed that supports were to be removed once the statue was in place (Bieber 1961: 77). Of course, this explanation implies that the presence of supports may indicate that the work was left unfinished and that it had not been adjusted to its final context. In all these hypotheses, agreement in stressing the necessity of struts for the mechanics of production and trade carries the natural corollary of downplaying any further narrative or aesthetic concerns.

Only in recent years have differing voices attempted to underline the potential of supports to determine the visual impact of a statue and guide the modes of its appreciation. Wilfred Geominy, who briefly addressed the issue (1999: 49–51), described the supports on Roman marbles as visual cues for faithfulness. In this perspective, struts would advertise the commitment to reproduce the pose of an ancient Greek model with exactitude. In her landmark chapter on non-figural supports in Roman marble statuary, Mary Hollinshead (2002: esp. 148–152) suggested instead that shafts and bars may have often been instrumental in expanding the sculptor's choice of models. According to her view, the use of struts offered the possibility of translating designs derived from two-dimensional sources – such as paintings – into marble.

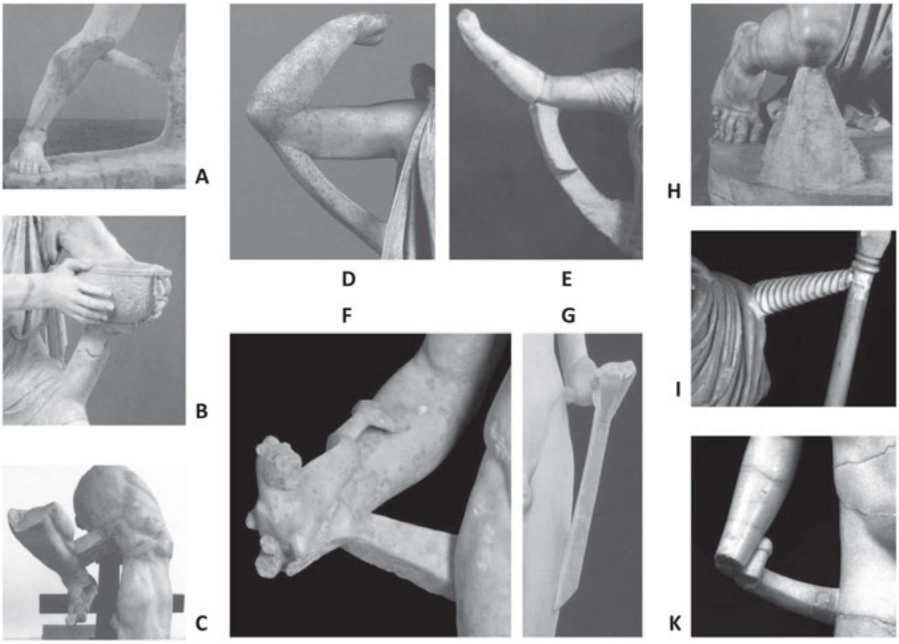

Figure 4: Examples of struts: A–B) statues of Ulysses and his companion from the nymphaeum at Punta Epitaffio, Baiae; C) Polyphemus from Sperlonga; D) Dresden Artemis; E) Melpomene from Miletus; F) statue of Poseidon from Burdur; G) Wine-Pouring Satyr in Palermo; H) Atlas Farnese; I) Capitoline group of Venus and Mars; K) Capitoline Eros (Photos A–B: Andreae 1983: 81, 91; D: Skulpturensammlung Dresden; C, E–K: DAI-Rome)

By exploring these arguments, with particular attention to the theories formulated by Geominy and Hollinshead, the present paper tries to define the meaning and potential of structural supports with regard to the debate on originality and tradition in Roman art. The underlying core question revolves around the possibility of understanding supports other than as simple evidence of derivation, but rather as visual cues intended to foster appreciation and comparative appraisal of the copies and their qualities, relative to one another. The principal consequence of this approach lies in the opportunity of matching the information handed down by the ancient Greek and Latin literary sources and the archaeological record, while reconstructing the Roman attitude towards ‘true copies’ and replica series deriving from Classical Greek masterpieces.

Forms, places, and times

Size and form of non-figural supports in Roman marble statuary vary considerably (*cf.* the fundamental survey in Hollinshead 2002: 127–129). Their dimensions range from thin connectors to huge shafts. In many freestanding sculptures, horizontal bars

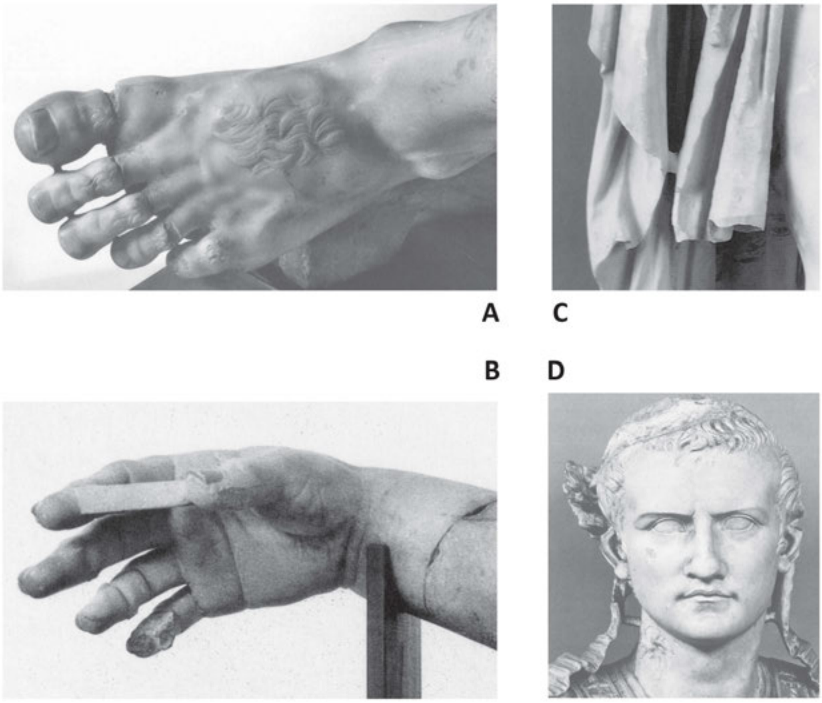

Figure 5: Examples of struts connecting minute elements: A–B) statue of Polyphemus from Sperlonga; C) Ulysses from the nymphaeum at Punta Epitaffio, Baiae; D) portrait of Caligula at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek, Copenhagen (Photos A–B, D: DAI-Rome; C: Andreae 1983: Fig. 86)

link both calves of a nude figure or fasten the body to an extrinsic support (often a tree stump, an animal, or an ancillary figure). Elsewhere, struts are used to stabilize the bent knee of a crouching figure or to secure extended arms and hanging drapery. Attested shapes are likewise extremely diverse and include pyramidal props, flat wedge-shaped connectors, polygonal bars, cylinders, and rods decorated with abstract patterns (Fig. 4). Even minute elements such as fingers, toes, and tiny attributes can be fixed with struts (Fig. 5).

Certainly, supports were often meant to remain invisible, and their function was merely structural (*cf.* for instance Schröder 2004: 149–150; Leander Touati 1998: Pl. 16.1). In many cases, however, their share in the visual impact of the composition is more than obvious. For instance, the first-century A.D. sculptor who carved the wine-pouring satyr from Torre del Greco, now in Palermo, chose to append a conspicuous support to his work (Gercke 1968: 4–5 St. 5; Martinez in Pasquier and Martinez 2007: 272–273 no. 66). Unlike any other item of the replica series, which is thought to go back to a creation of the fourth-century Greek master Praxiteles, the statue in Palermo

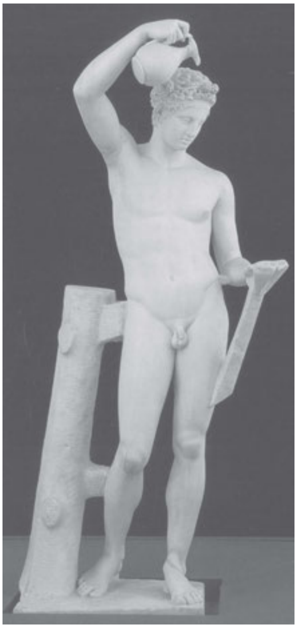

Figure 6: Replica of the Wine-Pouring Satyr, from Torre del Greco. Palermo, Museo Archeologico Regionale Antonio Salinas (Photo DAI-Rome)

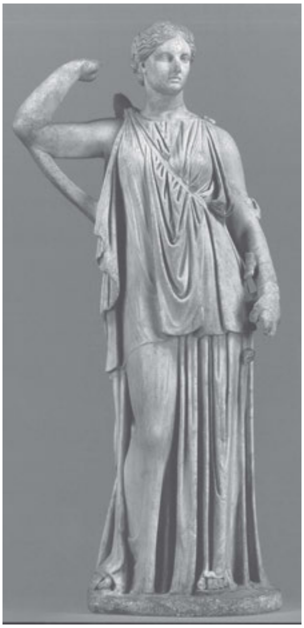

Figure 7: So-called Dresden Artemis. Dresden, Skulpturensammlung (Photo Skulpturensammlung Dresden)

displays a long bar of stone to connect the satyr's extended left hand to his thigh (Fig. 6). Similarly, another statue dating to roughly the same period, the Vatican Apoxyomenos (below, Fig. 12), shows the stubs of a huge strut from thigh to waist, that must have even prevented full view of the instrument that gave the statue its title: the strigil to scrape away sweat and dust after exercise.

Outstretched arms were sometimes fastened by an arched support reaching from hip to elbow. This is the case in the so-called Dresden Artemis (Fig. 7) and in the Melpomene from the Baths of Faustina in Miletus (respectively Geominy in Knoll, Vorster and Woelk 2011: 183 no. 15 and Schneider 1999: 8 and Pls. 1, 3). In another statue from the same building in Miletus, a Venus now missing head and legs, the lifted right arm is linked to the body thanks to two conspicuous supports: one from her right hip to elbow, the other connecting her right biceps to wrist (Manderscheid 1991: 94 no. 213 and Pl. 31; Hollinshead 2002: 147 Fig. 6.20). The same solution was chosen by the mid-second century A.D. sculptor of the so-called Protesilaos now in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 8), whose emphatic gesture was accentuated by a couple of long and parallel bar-like supports, from the right elbow to thigh and from the right biceps to wrist (Richter 1954: 22–23 no. 27. For a similar support from the shoulder to the raised hand Delivorrias 1984: 63 no. 527 and related Fig. on Vol. II; *cf.* also Soleti 2010: Pls. XXVI–XXVII).

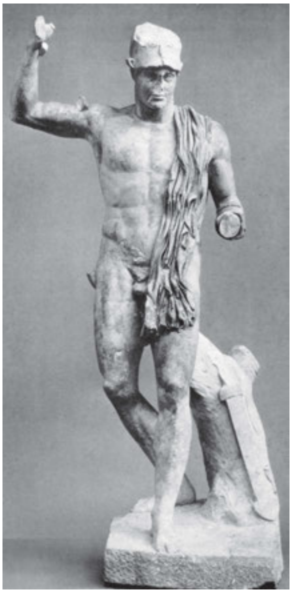

Figure 8: So-called Protesilaos. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (Photo ARTstor)

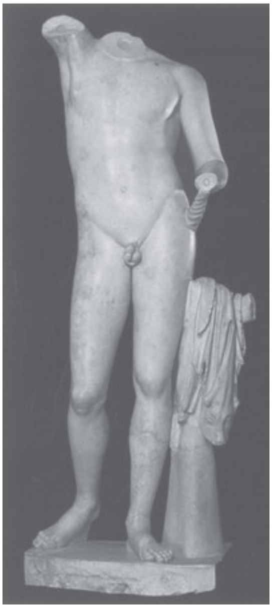

Figure 9: Replica of the Wine-Pouring Satyr. Paris, Musée du Louvre (photo: RMN – GP Musee du Louvre)

Smaller struts often received delicate carving and were given a faceted shape, whilst larger rods were often worked solely with the coarse point, in order to distinguish their surface from the adjacent flesh or drapery (*cf.* for example Conticello 1974: Pl. 19b; Maderna-Lauter 1990; Vorster 1993: 244 Figs. 118–119). A peculiar treatment seems to have been relatively frequent especially from the second century A.D., in the period when eye-catching supports became the standard: cylindrical or conical struts decorated with a spiral motif (*cf.* Hollinshead 2002: 129–130). The set of examples includes both full-size statues and miniatures, and works of the finest workmanship as well as rather crude compositions (see for instance Ozols 1962: 21–24; Schmidt 1968; Inan 1975: 170–171 no. 95 and Pl. 78.2–3; Comsock and Vermeule 1976: 89–90 no. 139). This solution was chosen in two copies of the wine-pouring satyr, carved about one century later than their counterpart in Palermo. The extended left arm of the satyr in Carrara marble from the Borghese collection, now at the Louvre (Martinez in Pasquier and Martinez 2007: 274–276 no. 67; Gercke 1968: 9 no. T.5), was held up by a finely-carved spiralling groove (Fig. 9). A similar twisted strut must have once completed the Ludovisi replica in Luni marble, whose modern restorers misunderstood the spiral stub sprouting from the youth's left hip and transformed it into an unusual drinking vessel (on this mid-second century statue *cf.* Amadio in Giuliano 1992: 194–199 no. 24; Gercke 1968: 5–6 no. St. 6).

Clearly, that struts could be embellished belies the modern postulate of invisibility and the idea that they must have necessarily looked disagreeable to the Roman viewers. The accurate treatment of many examples excludes that supports were always intended to remain concealed, hidden from the scrutiny of a public who found them as visually jarring as we do today. An explicit confirmation comes from a late antique miniature group of Venus removing her sandal, found near the ancient city of Alexandria and belonging to the decoration of a seaside villa (Hannestad 1994: 123–126). The piece is completed by an oversized support between the bodies of Venus and the helpful Cupid at her side. The twisted surface is polished and rendered with the utmost accuracy, and together with the soft modelling of the two figures creates a skilful play between light and the material (Fig. 10). In other cases, spiral supports were chosen for expressive reasons if suited to the individual piece. The so-called Mazarin Apollo now at the Louvre in the pose of the Mantua type, for instance, bears traces of a rope-like support between the body and arm which recalls the treatment of the lyre handle which he held in his left hand (Zanker 1974: 61 no. 2, who dates the work to the early imperial period). Similarly, the draped body of a woman sacrificing at a flaming altar, now in the Uffizi, is connected to the flame through a horizontal support, whose twisted shape smoothes the passage between wavy surfaces (Mansuelli 1961: II, 107–108 no. 134).

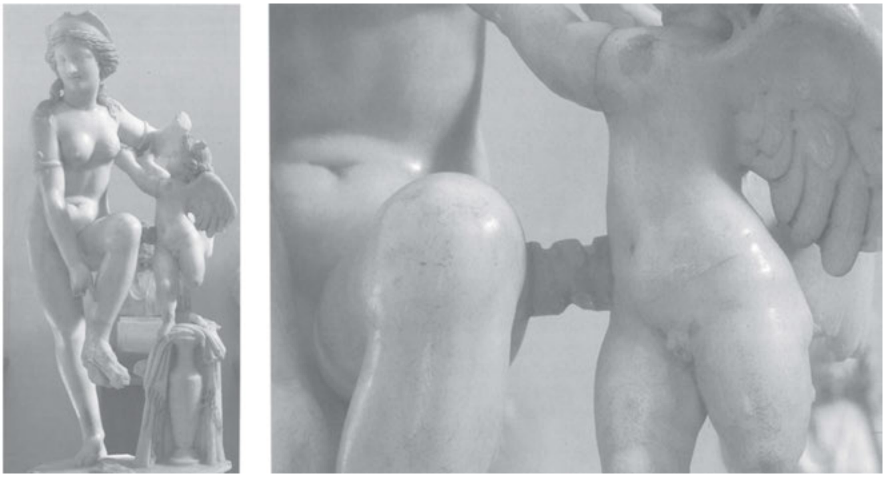

Figure 10: Detail of a statue of Venus and Cupid, from Sidi Bishr. Alexandria, Greek and Roman Museum (Hannestad 1994: 125 Fig. 82)

In these latter examples, struts integrate into the composition and function as abstract supplements to the human figure. In sculptures with massive supports, the same effect could be reached by aligning the marble shafts to the limbs or attributes. The slightly arched support of the Dresden Artemis echoes the line of the goddess's quiver and shoulder belt (above, Fig. 7). In a much later image of the huntress, the fourth-century A.D. little statue from Saint-George-de-Montaigne, now in Bordeaux, many struts link thigh, flying garment, and raised right arm, while delineating an arch complementary to the bow that Diana holds in her left hand (Hollinshead 2002: 134–135). The sturdy rectilinear support between the hand and thigh of the Palermo wine-pouring satyr, instead, runs parallel to the satyr's lower right leg and to the slanting tree stump – while the short strut from his left hip to arm seems to continue the line of one connector between the inclined tree trunk and the nude body (above, Fig. 6).

In principle, struts could be individually designed from the beginning, or be adapted to the display context. Unfortunately, our synecdochical understanding of the ancient exhibition contexts for statuary, with few known settings being used as a source for general patterns and criteria, prevents further remarks on this topic in this direction. Nonetheless, there is one case where a support seems to have been purposely adapted with a view to the statue's final setting – the *nymphaeum* at Punta Epitaffio at Baiae – and its environment. The cup proffered by the statue of Ulysses, in fact, could be made to overflow thanks to a hole at the bottom rear of a strut which linked the vessel to the hero's thigh and led up to a water channel (Andreae 1983: 50 and Pl. 83).

All these remarks help the reconsideration of one of the hypothesis outlined before: that struts were primarily intended for transportation. On the one hand, every statue had certainly to be moved at some point, and just as certainly any support would improve the chances that a marble body might survive transport intact. On the other hand, that struts were more than a practical precaution is implicit in their usually not being removed once a statue was in place. Besides, they were often added to statues irrespective of actual constraints and static concerns. In many instances, struts occur in highly visible yet unnecessary spots. Often, excessive dimensions put struts themselves far more at risk of breaking than any other parts of the statue – as was the case with the Vatican Apoxyomenos which, indeed, survives intact except for the huge strut (below, Fig. 12).

The frequent uselessness of supports emerges in the case of a peculiar device, the so-called 'neck strut' or 'nape strut': a heavy, squared, and often rough block of stone left behind the neck, with an effect that cannot fail to puzzle the modern viewer (Fig. 11). It is very possible that nape struts served primarily as safeguards for transportation, reinforcing a point of potential weakness. However, their occurrence in compositions which hardly require such a precaution, as well as the regional concentration in Asia Minor and North Africa suggest that this may have become a convention among local stone-carvers (Inan and Rosenbaum 1966: *passim* and Pls. 28.2, 32.1, 40.1, 52.1, 135.1, 143.1, 145.3, 146.2–3, 151.1, 170.3; Stirling 2005: 117–119). No less than huge bar-like shafts connecting the limbs of a human body, nape struts are fatally at odds with our ideas of beauty, completeness, and visual congruence, but nonetheless seem to have been naturally accepted by those who bought and displayed marble sculptures throughout the Mediterranean world.

Neck struts even occurred where stability may be compromised by the imposition of additional weight, as well as in miniature figures – for instance, in a statuette of Ganymede from the Egyptian collection in Munich, whose neck is burdened with a quadrangular roughly-worked strut (Müller 1975: 235–242 and Pls. 51–52). Indeed, a significant part of the whole corpus of struts is found in miniature statues, to connect

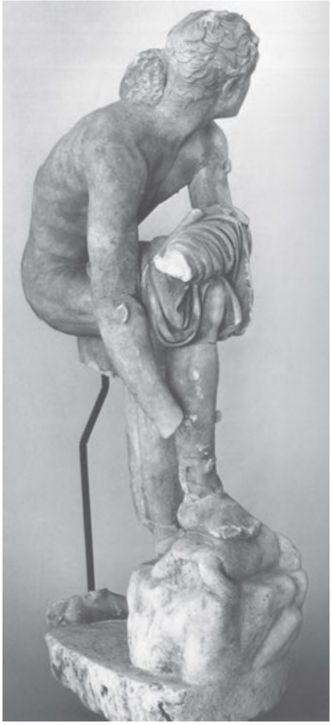

Figure 11: Replica of the Hermes 'Sandalenbinder', from Perge (Inan 1993: Pl. 36.2)

tiny attributes, diminutive appendages, and small limbs, whose size and weight hardly require any such support (Bartman 1992: 39). Especially from the second century A.D. onward, many miniature statues display an imaginative array of supports, according to a trend that culminated in Late Antiquity, when multi-figured statuettes linked by intricate struts enjoyed a remarkable appreciation, following a more general taste for sophisticate compositions (Bonfante and Carter 1987: 251–255; Stirling 2005: 71–73, 101 Fig. 50, 107–108).

To summarize, we may conclude that structural supports, under certain circumstances and up to a certain degree, can contribute to a stylistic evaluation of chronology and provenance. The question is how much further can we pull these considerations and integrate supports in the study of workshops and particular stone-carvers. As elements whose size, position, and workability are affected by the physical characters of the stone, struts can only integrate the body of evidence created by other and more reliable indicators, as observed by Hollinshead (2002: 138). Nonetheless, scholars have sometimes included the difference in supports among the stylistic features which allowed assigning to different workshops the statues belonging to a coherent setting (*cf.* the summary in Hollinshead 2002: 138–139). This has been the case, for instance, with the statues from the *nymphaeum* of Herodes Atticus at Olympia (Bol 1984: 20–21), or with those from the submerged *nymphaeum* at Punta Epitaffio, at Baiae (Andreae 1983). On the contrary, the similar shape of many supports in the Scylla and Polyphemus groups at Sperlonga has prompted scholars to ascribe both to the same sculptural workshop (Conticello 1974: 47, 49, 52).

Between utility and 'bravura'

Though it is hard to think of the supports as indirect artists' signatures, we should not overlook this aspect entirely. While stabilizing an expressive body gesture, conspicuous supports emphasize the posture and action, so as to draw attention to the composition and its difficulties.

Carving sturdy supports which allowed expansive postures by fastening the outstretched limb to the body required a great deal of extra marble, sometimes as much as twice the amount needed for the sole human figure (as observed by Geominy 1999: 59 Appendix VII; Trimble 2011: 77). Often the same composition could have been economically and easily assembled by attaching the extended arms to the torso. Nevertheless, struts remained the favourite option, especially from the second century A.D., when larger blocks of marble became widely available in the Roman Empire (Claridge 1988: 149). That the two techniques were not mutually exclusive hints that struts were considered a desirable composition strategy in comparison with the cheaper

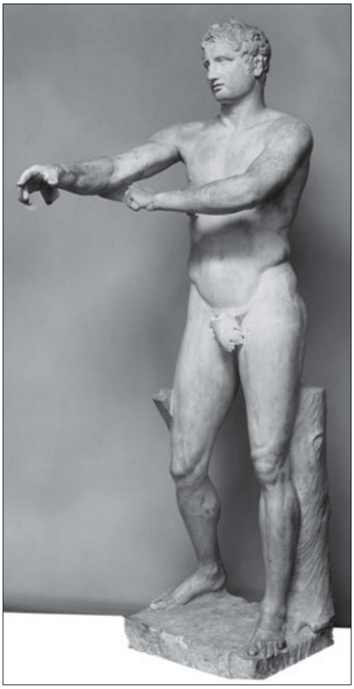

Figure 12: Replica of the Apoxyomenos of Lysippos. Vatican Museums (photo DAI-Rome)

and less visible alternative of piecing. One example is the statue in Pentelic marble of a storming Hercules at the Centrale Montemartini in Rome, once equipped with a long marble rod to support his outstretched right arm, while his raised left one was fastened with a dowel (von Steuben in Helbig II: 388 no. 1585; for images of the arms *cf.* Linfert 1990: 275 Fig. 150; Bertoletti, Cima and Talamo 1999: 98).

The athlete scraping himself in the Vatican Museums provides a perfect case in point to broaden this range of considerations (Fig. 12). At the time when this replica in Pentelic marble was set up in Rome, around the mid-first century A.D., the memory of the statue created by Lysippos centuries before was more than vivid. According to Pliny the Elder, the original bronze Apoxyomenos still was in Rome at the time of Tiberius (*HN* 34.62), and had been in the spotlight because of the scandal of its removal from public display by the Emperor, who had to return the statue to the Baths of Agrippa under public pressure. The fame and public accessibility of the original must have rendered the copy immediately recognizable and, with it, its two main differences: material and the strut. By choosing to secure the figure by simply attaching the outstretched right arm, the artist would have followed closely its bronze model while complying with the current workshop's practices, in a period when the technique of piecing still prevailed. Instead, he fastened the projecting limb to the body thanks to a huge support, which even prevented full view of the youth's left hand and strigil.

This solution advertised, together, the means for conspicuous consumption of marble and the technical proficiency of the stone-carver. It seems relevant to point out that the choice of appending huge bar-like supports to high-quality marble copies of famous masterpieces from the Greek past seems to have enjoyed a certain success during the mid-first century B.C., when the purchase of a larger block of marble than necessary still required a relatively substantial economic effort. This is the case, for example, with the Palermo wine-pouring satyr (above, Fig. 6) and with the New York Diadoumenos (above, Fig. 1), both singled out by one major peculiarity among other replicas of their series: the presence of solid yet unnecessary supports fastening raised or outstretched arms.

It seems no coincidence that around the same years our main Latin source about the history of ancient art, Pliny the Elder, repeatedly praised the ability of extracting complex compositions from a single block of marble, mentioning with admiration works created '*ex uno lapide*' or '*ex eodem lapide*' (*HN* 36.34; 36.36; 36.37; 36.41; *cf.* Settis 1999, 79–81). What remains implicit in Pliny's account of marble sculpture is that this medium offered far fewer possibilities for artists to reach fame and praise than did painting and bronze statuary (Settis 1999: 41–42, 44). Besides, according to Pliny, the huge number of marble statues ('*multitudo operum*') in Rome bears the consequence of easily effacing their image from the viewer's mind and causes forgetfulness of their authors' name (*HN* 36.27). Following Pliny's discourse, the intrinsic difficulty of the material and the unwelcome side effects of overcrowding could only be bridged by means of technical virtuosity. It is essentially a consequence of its having being exquisitely carved from one single block of stone that, according to Pliny (*HN* 36.37), the Laocoon has to be considered a paramount example of '*marmoris gloria*' and is superior to any other work in bronze or painting (‘*opus omnibus et picturae et statuariae artis praeferendum*’).

Of all four statues said to be carved from a single block of stone, one, a team of four horses with a chariot driven by Apollo and Diana, had been dedicated by Augustus in a prominent public spot on the Palatine (*HN* 36.36). The other three belonged to some of the most famous collections of late-Republican and early-Imperial Rome: those of Asinius Pollio (the group of Dirce with the bull described in *HN* 36.34), Varro (the group of winged Cupids playing with a lioness mentioned in *HN* 36.41), and the Emperor Titus, who owned the famous Laocoon (*HN* 36.37). None of these masterpieces ‘*ex uno lapide*’ remains anonymous, but the virtuosity of their execution ensures long-lasting memory of their sculptors: respectively, Lysias for the chariot of Apollo and Diana, Apollonius and Tauriscus from Rhodes for the group of Dirce, Arcesilaus for the Cupids and lioness, and the Rhodian trio of Hagesander, Polydorus, and Athenodorus for the Laocoon.

Scholars have sometimes suggested the likelihood of an identification of the group of Dirce owned by Asinius Pollio with the so-called ‘Toro Farnese’ from the Baths of Caracalla (*cf.* La Rocca 1998: 239–271, especially 258, 269 and Rausa 2010, both with earlier bibliography, for differing views on the issues of chronology and derivation). Notwithstanding its huge dimensions, the colossal group now in Naples was carved in a single block of white marble (Prisco 1991: 61), like the work of Apollonius and Tauriscus recorded by Pliny. It is of little relevance, to this discourse, that the only other of Pliny’s works ‘*ex uno lapide*’ which, according to the historians of ancient art, may have survived to our time – the Laocoon – is in fact composed of more than one block of stone. What matters is rather the pervasiveness of the indication ‘*ex uno lapide*’ as a real *topos* of the learned discourse on marble statuary and an undisputed quality mark (Settis 1999: 49–50 sharply comments on the equivalence, in ancient art criticism, of *being* and *seeming* made ‘*ex uno lapide*’). We could push this line of thought further and find in this conscious ‘misuse’ of the label the literary parallel for the workshops’ documented practice of combining huge struts and joins in the same figure. When the posture and size of the figure on the one hand, and the selling price on the other, required that at least one of the projecting limbs be carved separately, the choice of also appending a large strut to the figure could at least simulate the means for conspicuous consumption.

Marble statues such as the Vatican Apoxyomenos, the wine-pouring Satyr in Palermo, or the New York Diadumenos were far less complicated in pose than the groups mentioned by Pliny and were constantly at risk of passing unnoticed among the wealth of similar copies from the same prototypes. These images could find in huge supports a strategy to state both their individuality and costliness, as well as the technical skills of their author. As expensive sculptures, carved from a sole block of marble much larger than necessary, they emulated the prestige of larger compositions dedicated by the Emperors or displayed in the homes and gardens of the richest collectors.

Supporting the copies

One possibility to expand this line of thought is to take a closer look at the position and features of supports throughout the items of one replica series. Clearly, copying a familiar type did not imply repeating the same pattern with struts. In fact, different copies of the same composition, recognized as deriving from a famous Classical prototype, invariably display supports in a variety of shapes and positions, visualizing the weight of stone and the fragility of the pose. This has been considered as prime evidence for a bronze prototype, which naturally needed no such additions (among others, Andreae 1982: 176). Nonetheless, a careful look at one well-documented replica series allows us to approach the question according to different criteria, which include the visual qualities of the copies and their individuality.

From this perspective, the case of the Diadoumenos or youth binding the fillet is, again, particularly illuminating. Some of the replicas avoided supports almost entirely, with the exception of the tree trunk beside the athlete (above, Fig. 2). Elsewhere, they proliferated in both useful and unnecessary spots, as is the case of the New York Diadoumenos, where a solid vertical bar must have extended even from the right shoulder to the thin fillet that the youth is tying around his head (above, Fig. 1). In between these two poles, several variations are attested. One torso in Basel, dating to the age of Claudius, bears traces of struts on both hips, that must have supported the athlete’s raised arms, as well as an additional stub on the right thigh probably connecting to the tree trunk on that side (Kreikenbom 1990: 191 no. V.10 and Pls. 269–270). The fragmentary replica from the same period now in Naples, too, shows the remains of one single large broken strut oriented upwards from the right thigh (Zanker 1974: Pls. 8–9; Kreikenbom 1990: 191 no. V.11 and Pls. 271–272). With a different choice yet again, the later copy which is today on display in the Prado Museum in Madrid has a perfectly preserved support between the left shoulder and wrist – while modern restorations prevent any inference on the solution chosen for the right side (Schröder 2004: 67–73 no. 104). Both ends of the fillet tied by the heavily-restored Diadoumenos now in the Villa Albani, instead, were linked to the shoulders by solid bars (Kreikenbom 1990: 190 no. V.9 and Pl. 268). Only one torso of the Diadoumenos, found at Perge and dating perhaps to the Hadrianic age, is provided with a coarsely-shaped neck strut (Kreikenbom 1990: 192 no. V.17 and Pl. 281).

It is perhaps in the effects of visual complexity and in the possibility of differentiation that we should search for the meaning of struts, their role in visual communication, and their significance to the discourse on copies. As stressed by the Latin sources, copying an illustrious prototype with exactitude ranked among the highest accomplishments of an artist. According to the ancient literature on art, the emulation of the *antiqui* entailed both creative competition and faithful copying, as two different yet closely connected attempts at rising to the level of the ancient masters and equalling their skills. The taste for retrospection that permeated Roman art accounts for the fortune of new compositions based on past motifs and styles, as well as for the spread of true copies of very diverse artistic quality. On the one hand, huge struts would be easily recognized as something typical of marble sculpture and, especially in cases where their presence was more decorative than structural, visualized the relationship to a bronze prototype. On the other hand, in the case of widespread replica series large supports would prompt the memory of similar images, whose composition followed different criteria (on sculptural copies as instruments for the manipulation of memories *cf.* Anguissola, Forthcoming). This way, multiple copies were tied into a system of mutual reference and comparison, advertising their own uniqueness and the talent of their authors.

This preliminary survey reveals that the difference of supports within a given replica series bears far more complex implications than what has been assumed by the traditional copy criticism. As the only elements that could not be derived from the prototype and had to be carved without the aid of casts and plastic models, struts interfered profoundly with the mechanics of translation into marble. Modern accounts of the ancient workshops' techniques have often referred to the process of copying bronze prototypes into marble thanks to plaster casts. One possibility was that of taking point-by-point measurements from the cast with the aid of calipers and other instruments, and then transferring these points to the block of stone (*cf.* Richter 1962; Duthoy Frel 2000; Touchette 2000). In order to append large tri-dimensional supports which intersected the various planes of a composition, the grid prepared for transferring the measures to the stone had to be revised and adapted accordingly. At times, the difficulty with combining the forms of the prototype with intrusive additions might have even required to resort partially to relief-like two-dimensional carving from front to back (which is suggested by Hollinshead 2002: 150 as a consequence of choosing pictorial models). In other terms, struts may attest the artist's ability in retaining the forms of the prototype while in fact producing strikingly creative modifications, which affected the overall effect of the statue as well as its stability. Faithful in the replication of the body yet personalized in terms of structure, the copy could function, up to a certain degree, as a masterpiece in its own right, stimulating recognition, comparison, and judgment.

Within an essentially conservative visual culture, the value of struts as indicators of both tradition and ingenuity explains their widespread popularity also in the category of the so-called 'ideal sculpture' – statues that are 'Greek' in form and content, although not replicating exactly a specific prototype. In miniature statues and groups, often relying loosely on some renowned prototype, unnecessary supports might have functioned as a general allusion to a full-sized prototype, hinting at some association with large-scale statuary. What matters, in the use of supports, is rather the *impression* that they can broadcast of both conspicuous consumption and an illustrious lineage. By hinting at the prestige and excellence of the *inventio*, struts visualized authority and integrated the statue within a coherent stylistic and semantic tradition. Restoring structural supports to their place within a comprehensive view of Roman sculpture, as meaningful stylistic elements, contributes significantly to the effort of framing the discourse on imitation and originality within its historical, technical, and cultural background.

Institut für Klassische Archäologie, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich

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