

# Dionysus in Marble and on Paper: Looking at the Culture of Collecting and Changing Practices in Conservation

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## Abstract

During the eighteenth-century, many aristocrats collected ancient stone sculptures from Italy and Greece, for installation in their grand residences. The majority of these sculptures were restored (sometimes heavily so). This essay will examine two artefacts representing the Greek god Dionysus. The first is a drawing of a Roman statue by the sculptor Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, after restoration by him for the English collector Lord Lansdowne. The second is a fragment (torso) of that statue, which was de-restored at some unknown point in the last seventy-five years. Both artefacts are informative in regard to the culture of collecting during the eighteenth-century, and to changing approaches to conservation.

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In 1734, a group of gentlemen, many of whom had been on 'the Grand Tour' formed a society in London, under the Name of the *Dilettanti*, to socialise and keep alive memories of their travels and shared experiences.<sup>1</sup> In time they financed expeditions to Italy and Greece. During these trips they recorded images of antiquities they visited, which were subsequently published in magnificent folios in Britain.<sup>2</sup> These exquisite drawings and their accompanying descriptions served to promote the arts and influence public taste, both of which were aims of the Society.<sup>3</sup> They also are direct evidence of the Society's commitment to the study of antiquity.<sup>4</sup> During their travels abroad and while in residence in England, many Dilettanti bought ancient stone sculptures, the majority of which were restored, sometimes heavily so, for their residences. Their houses and celebrated collections gave them recognition and status, and reputations as learned connoisseurs. Some of their collections made their way into British museums.<sup>5</sup> It would be disingenuous not to point out, however, that many works of art were removed and transported under questionable circumstances, which would be considered unethical today.

British politician and Society of Dilettanti member William Petty (1737-1805), the Second Earl of Shelburne, later Marquess of Lansdowne, was a major collector of ancient marble sculptures.<sup>6</sup> One of those sculptures, a statue of Dionysus, will be examined in this essay, along with a drawing of it by the sculptor Bartolomeo Cavaceppi (1717-1799) who heavily restored it before it was bought by Lord Lansdowne. In the 1930s the *Lansdowne Dionysus* was sold by Lansdowne's descendants and purchased by the collector Wright S. Ludington (1900-1991) and is now installed, along with the drawing, at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA). Examining Cavaceppi's drawing of the *Dionysus* statue (after restoration by him) and comparing it with the statue as it appears today, without its restored parts necessarily involves an investigation into the culture of collecting and eighteenth-century restoration practices in Britain.

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<sup>1</sup> Preface to Chandler, Richard, Nicholas Revett, William Pars, and Society of Dilettanti (London, England), *Ionian Antiquities* (London: [Society of Dilettanti]: Printed by T. Spilsbury and W. Haskell, 1769), pp. i-ii <[http://archive.org/details/gri\\_33125011158744](http://archive.org/details/gri_33125011158744)> [accessed 18 March 2015]. This work will be referenced in the following as: Society of Dilettanti, *Ionian Antiquities*.

<sup>2</sup> Society of Dilettanti, *Ionian Antiquities*, p. 2; Redford, Bruce, *Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England* (Los Angeles, CA: The J. Paul Getty Trust, 2008), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Society of Dilettanti, *Ionian Antiquities*, Preface, p. ii.

<sup>4</sup> Redford, pp. 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> Redford, p. 199.

<sup>6</sup> Howard, Seymour, *Bartolomeo Cavaceppi: Eighteenth-Century Restorer* (New York and London: Garland, 1982), p. 89.



**Figure 1. *Lansdowne Dionysus*, Santa Barbara Museum of Art.**  
Photograph used with permission of the author, Franz Kurfess.

The *Lansdowne Dionysus*, shown in Figure 1, is a large fragment of a monumental marble statue dating from circa second-century AD. Two of the attributes of the mostly nude, obviously male torso enable us to identify it as Dionysus: first, the long hair winding down over the shoulders, and second and more importantly, the animal skin arranged loosely over the body.<sup>7</sup> The statue most likely belonged to Emperor Hadrian (76 AD-138 AD) and stood in the gardens of his magnificent villa at Tivoli, outside of Rome. Most probably it was removed from a low-lying boggy area at the villa by Gavin Hamilton, who began excavating there in 1769 and in all removed more than seventy individual works of ancient sculpture.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Santa Barbara Museum of Art, *Lansdowne Dionysus*. Visitor Information, undated, obtained December 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Sofroniew, Alexandra, *The Secret Lives of the Ludington/Lansdowne Dionysus*, Getty Villa for Art Talks, October 27, 2011; unpublished manuscript, obtained from the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, January 2015.



**Figure 2. Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, *Dionysus*.**

Engraving, from multi-volume, illustrated record of the works of art, *Raccolta d'antiche statue busti teste cognite ed altre sculture antiche scelte restaurate da Bartolomeo Cavaceppi scultore romano*, vol. I, plate 17 (Rome: Generoso Salomoni, published in 1768-72).

In the drawing of *Dionysus* by Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, shown in Figure 2, he is depicted in a relaxed, contrapposto stance, with his right hip thrust out and right hand raised over his head. He leans on a support in the form of the stem of a tree, which is entwined with grapes and grape leaves. He holds a bunch of grapes in his left hand and wears a wreath of ivy. An animal skin of a feline (or fawn) is draped across his body; the head of the dead animal hangs at waist-height.<sup>9</sup> In Greek mythology Dionysus (known to the Romans as Bacchus) was the youthful god of wine, vegetation, and ecstasy. He was the son of Zeus, born from his thigh after the death of his mother Semele, a Theban princess. Dionysus was 'the roaring one', a 'bull-horned god', because he often manifested as a bull, rampant with fertility and power.<sup>10</sup> The youngest of the twelve celebrated Olympians, and the God of the Vine, he could be both benevolent and cruel, capable of making men merry as well as mad, and sometimes driving his followers to commit brutal, savage deeds. In the words of Edith Hamilton, 'He was man's benefactor and he was man's destroyer'.<sup>11</sup>

Dionysus was a very popular deity, and most of his followers were women. His female devotees, known as *Maenads*, are represented in art and literature as women frenzied with wine, who worshipped Dionysus in the mountains, forests and woodlands, where

<sup>9</sup> Santa Barbara Museum of Art, *Lansdowne Dionysus*. Visitor Information. In the following referenced as SBMA *Lansdowne Dionysus*. Visitor Information.

<sup>10</sup> Cotterell, Arthur, *A Dictionary of World Mythology: Dionysus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, online version, 2003) [accessed 16 February 2015].

<sup>11</sup> Hamilton, Edith, *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* (New York: The Penguin Group, 1969), pp. 56-60.

they danced and sang and celebrated the wild beauty of the world. However, they would also hunt and capture the wild creatures they encountered and feast on their raw red flesh. When they accompanied Dionysus to Thebes, his mother's city, to establish his worship there, they wore fawn skins over their robes and waved wands with wreaths of ivy.<sup>12</sup> In Cavaceppi's drawing of the restored *Dionysus*, he wears the skin of a feline, and a wreath of ivy.

After its excavation in Italy, the marble torso made its way to the Roman workshop of Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, a sculptor, restorer and art dealer. His workshop became an important stop for British tourists in the latter part of the eighteenth-century. From 1729 to 1733 Cavaceppi apprenticed under the French sculptor Pierre-Etienne Monnot, during which time he entered the Accademia di St. Luca, where he became a prize-winning student.<sup>13</sup> In 1734, Cardinal Albani, the nephew of Pope Clement XI, who was a private collector of antiquities in Rome, designated Cavaceppi as his restorer. Cavaceppi's association with the cardinal led to many commissions from foreign tourists, especially from British tourists who wished to establish collections at home.

Between the years 1768 and 1772 Cavaceppi published three volumes of engraved images of sculptures he had restored or owned, the *Raccolta d'antiche statue, busti, teste cognite*; this publication secured his renown.<sup>14</sup> According to Southworth:

Thousands of pieces passed through his [Cavaceppi's] workshops and the body of his known work is sufficient to allow identification of his characteristic style.<sup>15</sup>

English buyers had a major influence on the development of the business of the restoration of ancient sculptures. 'Restorers developed skills and techniques to suit the English market and country house interiors'.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the majority of the sculptures that entered Britain during the eighteenth century were restored.<sup>17</sup>

Collections were formed in several ways. Many collectors bought items themselves when on the Grand Tour. Some bought sculptures through agents acting on their behalf on the antiquities market. The restoration process was a lengthy one and was often managed by an agent, however, even if the collector himself chose the sculptures.<sup>18</sup> The role of the agent was multi-faceted, and involved everything from aesthetic advice to financial and shipping services. Restorers and dealers such as Thomas Jenkins and Gavin Hamilton were directly involved in the excavation of ancient sites, as has been previously noted.<sup>19</sup> Southworth tells us, about the role of the restorer:

Where a substantial portion of the original is missing the restorer has considerable flexibility. Depending on where he stops recreating what he believes to be original, he can either fulfil the intention of the original artist or eventually create what is effectively a new piece. The eighteenth-century restoration of sculpture was a response to the English desire for material to display in sculpture galleries.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hamilton, pp. 56-7.

<sup>13</sup> Howard, Seymour, *Cavaceppi, Bartolomeo*, Grove Art Online reference entry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) [accessed 17 January 2015].

<sup>14</sup> Getty Museum: Artists: *Cavaceppi, Bartolomeo*, online reference entry (Malibu: The J. Paul Getty Museum) [accessed 6 January 2015].

<sup>15</sup> Southworth, Edmund, 'The Role of the Collector', in *History of Restoration of Ancient Stone Sculptures*, ed. by Janet Burnett Grossman, Jerry Podany and Marion True (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), pp. 105-115 (p. 106).

<sup>16</sup> Feifer, Jane, 'Restoration and Display of Classical Sculpture in English Country Houses', in *History of Restoration of Ancient Stone Sculptures*, ed. by Janet Burnett Grossman, Jerry Podany and Marion True (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), pp. 87-105 (p. 87).

<sup>17</sup> Feifer, p. 92.

<sup>18</sup> Feifer, p. 92.

<sup>19</sup> Southworth, p. 106.

<sup>20</sup> Southworth, pp. 107-108.

He goes on to list major changes that were sometimes made to statues, including new body parts, bases, supports, and attributes such as grapes that would give a clue as to the identity of the figure. Resin and wax were used to fill new joints and mends, which were stained to match the marble. The difference between old and new marble was camouflaged by reworking and polishing the entire surface to either erase or create signs of age, or by staining it with tobacco.<sup>21</sup> According to Howard, collectors were well aware of contemporary restorers' procedures but they intentionally encouraged and overlooked them because they resulted in pieces they liked. And Cavaceppi was in the upper echelon of restorers, a favourite of collectors and their agents because of his skill as a sculptor and reputation for refined restorations.<sup>22</sup> However, he was not the only restorer of ancient sculptures in eighteenth-century Rome:<sup>23</sup>

Like his confederates, he was, as we have seen, a practitioner of the evils of restoration, but he was considered perhaps the most trustworthy, at least the most pleasing, of restorers, without whose additions the collector would not have the pleasant decoration, an all-important sign of *virtù* whose 'antique' attributes might afford him the opportunity to display his taste and erudition.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to note Howard's use of the word 'confederates' in reference to Cavaceppi, as though he were a member of a clandestine group of individuals engaged in perhaps questionable practices. It seems he was a consummate businessman as well as artist, who was supplying his customers' demands for 'pleasant decorations'. There appears to have been a tendency for completion, possibly caused by the demand for restored statues by buyers, many of them in England. In their preference for restored statues over fragments, they may have been more interested in statues as they appeared in antiquity, than in 'broken' and incomplete ones. For instance, Hamilton's primary motivation for excavating at Hadrian's villa was 'to find ancient marble suitable for restoring statues, reflecting his activities as a dealer'.<sup>25</sup> According to Jerry Podany, a conservator at the Getty, restoration practices have been in flux since Michelangelo's time. There has been a constant 'struggle between the need to preserve the authentic relic—untouched and pure—on one hand and the desire to repair, make whole again, and improve—to restore—on the other'.<sup>26</sup> While Michelangelo expressed respect for the fragmentary condition of statues, many artists of his time 'saw it as their artistic prerogative to use the ancient material as both a model of inspiration and a source of raw material'.<sup>27</sup>

The majority of classical marbles imported into England from about 1720 until 1800 went to the furnishing of country houses.<sup>28</sup> In order to demonstrate their influence, newly wealthy individuals bought land upon which they built luxurious country houses in the pompous Palladian style. Many filled the grand halls of their houses with collections of ancient sculpture.<sup>29</sup> For the leisure class, owning sculptures and displaying them was a form of self-expression, a declaration of one's erudition and station, and could also be a form of competition with other collectors. Aristocrats viewed themselves as connoisseurs whose leisure time and pursuits, which included hunting and riding, enhanced their respectability and conferred status. 'Foreign travel and classical sculpture were the currency of the connoisseur.'<sup>30</sup> Lord Lansdowne's collection at *Lansdowne House* was one

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<sup>21</sup> Southworth, pp. 107-108.

<sup>22</sup> Howard, pp. 220-21.

<sup>23</sup> Feifer, p. 87.

<sup>24</sup> Howard, p. 221.

<sup>25</sup> MacDonald, William Lloyd, *Hadrian's Villa and Its Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 294-295.

<sup>26</sup> Podany, Jerry, 'Lessons from the Past', in *History of Restoration of Ancient Stone Sculptures*, ed. by Janet Burnett Grossman, Jerry Podany and Marion True (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), pp. 13-25 (p. 14).

<sup>27</sup> Podany, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> Feifer, pp. 92-93.

<sup>29</sup> Feifer, p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> Feifer, p. 100.

of only two major collections in London. *Lansdowne House*, built in the 1760s and enclosed by a landscaped park, was referred to at the time as 'the country house of London'.<sup>31</sup> The German academic Adolf Michaelis, who classified and catalogued thousands of pieces of Greek and Roman sculpture in English private collections, visited *Lansdowne House* in both 1873 and 1877. His pioneering, first-hand study, entitled *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, was published in 1882.<sup>32</sup> English collectors dominated and inspired commerce in classical antiquities in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Michaelis describes English collecting during this period as England's 'Golden Age of Classical Dilettantism':

In an unintermitting stream the ancient marbles of Rome poured into the palaces of the aristocracy of Great Britain, whose wealth in some cases afforded the means of gratifying a real artistic taste by these possessions, and in others enabled them at any rate to fall into the new fashion of dilettantism, the *furor* for antique art.<sup>34</sup>

In the course of his myriad visits to their stately homes to classify and catalogue their collections, Michaelis understandably formed his own impressions of these collectors and their motivations, as well as those of their possible ancestors. What drove their passion for collecting sculpture: the desire to acquire beautiful things, the love of beauty, or something else? One can only speculate.

As it has been discussed, Lord Lansdowne amassed an incredible collection of ancient sculptures. He first visited Rome in 1771 where he purchased the first antique pieces from the dealers Hamilton and Jenkins, and perhaps from Cavaceppi. Over the course of twenty years he added to his collection at *Lansdowne House*, where it remained until its dispersal at auction at Christie's in the 1930s and the house was sold.<sup>35</sup> The outstanding statues that made his collection so renowned came from the excavations done by Hamilton, who became Lansdowne's principal agent in 1771 and in the subsequent two decades. According to Howard, who has written the definitive biography of the sculptor, Cavaceppi most likely restored the Lansdowne marbles, based on the appearance of the restorations.<sup>36</sup> Lansdowne bought the *Dionysus* statue after restoration by Cavaceppi, whose wonderful drawing of it (Figure 2) has been previously discussed. In his book *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, Michaelis notes the extensive repairs done to the statue:

New: the head, right arm lying thereon, and the left arm leaning on the stem of a tree, the stem itself, the lower part of the left leg, and three-quarters of the right leg, on which the body rests.<sup>37</sup>

In Cavaceppi's finely detailed drawing of the restored *Dionysus* statue (located on a wall directly behind it at the SBMA), one is reminded of the deity's association with both the vine (the grapes) and the hunt (the animal skin). Perhaps the statue's previous owners were beguiled by its beauty and sensuality as well as its mythological associations. Perhaps they identified with attributes of Hadrian. Of course, Cavaceppi's restoration of the statue was based on his interpretation of how it may have looked in antiquity. As mentioned above, the Lansdowne collection was dispersed in the 1930s when Lord Lansdowne's descendants put it up for sale. One of the prized pieces of the collection, the *Lansdowne Herakles*, was bought by the American industrialist, art collector and philanthropist J. Paul Getty in 1951, from a London dealer. It was his most beloved work

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<sup>31</sup> Feifer, p. 100.

<sup>32</sup> Coltman, Viccy, *Classical Sculpture and the Culture of Collecting in Britain Since 1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Howard, p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> Michaelis, Adolf, and C. A. M. (Charles Augustus Maude) Fennell, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1882), p. 2 <<http://archive.org/details/ancientmarblesin00michuoft>> [accessed 21 February 2015]; cited by Howard, p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> Howard, p. 89.

<sup>36</sup> Howard, p. 93.

<sup>37</sup> Michaelis, p. 445. (See also Christie's Catalogue, entry 108).

of art and served as the inspiration for the Getty Villa, a 're-imagined' ancient Roman country house, located in Malibu, California, that opened in 1974.<sup>38</sup>

The collector and philanthropist Wright S. Ludington, who made his fortune in banking and publishing, also purchased works of sculpture from the Lansdowne collection. For years one of them, the *Lansdowne Dionysus*, the subject of this essay, stood outside in the garden of his estate, *Val Verde*, near Santa Barbara, California.<sup>39</sup> Ludington was one of the founders of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, which was able to acquire many objects in his collection of antiquities after it was dispersed in 2009, including the *Lansdowne Dionysus*. Independent contractors conserved the sculpture in consultation with curators and conservators at the Getty Villa, before its installation at the SBMA in 2012.<sup>40</sup> It is one of the first works of art a visitor to the museum encounters, as it is located in a large, open, Roman-inspired atrium just off the lobby.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the inclination to replace missing parts of ancient sculptures began to abate. In the 1960s and 1970s, conservators and curators began to remove misrepresentative and often disfiguring additions made to sculptures.<sup>41</sup> A very significant project in this new trend in conservation towards de-restoration began with figures from the pediments of the temple of *Athena Aphaia* on the Island of Aegina, which are now located at the Glyptothek in Munich. From 1962 to 1965, Dieter Ohly, the museum director at the time, who was also the excavator at Aegina, had conservators remove the nineteenth-century restorations done on the sculptures by the renowned Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. The pioneering work by Ohly led to a new understanding of the figures as well as important technical information regarding Thorvaldsen's restoration practices.<sup>42</sup> This new trend toward de-restoration influenced work that was done by the Getty Museum in the mid-1970s on two large marble statues from the collection of another Dilettanti member, Thomas Hope. Jiri Friel, the first curator of the Getty Antiquities collections, and his conservator, David Rinne, made the decision to remove eighteenth-century restorations done to the *Statue of Athena* and the *Statue of Hygieia*. The de-restorations were deemed unsuccessful because they altered the appearance of the sculptures, and the results were not as enlightening as those obtained from the Aegina pieces.<sup>43</sup> The two statues were successfully re-restored by Getty Museum conservators in 2008; they are not only important works from antiquity but also informative in terms of eighteenth and nineteenth-century conservation practices.<sup>44</sup> Podany discusses the drive towards 're-restoration' that has characterised conservation in the late twentieth and now in the twenty-first century.<sup>45</sup> It has followed from dissatisfaction with the 'purist' approach that involved not only removing restorations from ancient fragments but also adding aspects which detracted from them and which resulted in the 'amputated remains of antiquity'.<sup>46</sup> Re-restoration is an acknowledgement that previous modifications to works are permanent and that they reflect the ethos of the period in which they were done.<sup>47</sup> In the case of the *Lansdowne Dionysus*, its eighteenth-century restorations were removed sometime during the seventy-year period it spent in Santa Barbara, before it was acquired by the museum (although the exact date is not known). Obviously, the statue has not been re-restored.

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<sup>38</sup> True, Marion, and Silveti, *The Getty Villa* (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), pp. xv-xvii.

<sup>39</sup> SBMA *Lansdowne Dionysus*. Visitor Information.

<sup>40</sup> Lee, Patricia, *Eye on Conservation: The Lansdowne Dionysus*, The Santa Barbara Museum of Art Blog <<http://blog.sbma.net/2011/01/eye-on-conservation-the-lansdowne-dionysus/>> [accessed 16 December 2014].

<sup>41</sup> True, Marion, 'Changing Approaches to Conservation', in *History of Restoration of Ancient Stone Sculptures*, ed. by Janet Burnett Grossman, Jerry Podany and Marion True (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), pp. 1-11 (p. 5).

<sup>42</sup> True, pp. 5-6.

<sup>43</sup> True, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> The J. Paul Getty Trust, 'Getty Museum Exhibition Spotlights Changing Practices in Antiquities Conservation', Getty News Release <[http://www.getty.edu/news/press/center/hope\\_hygieia\\_release\\_040208.html](http://www.getty.edu/news/press/center/hope_hygieia_release_040208.html)> [accessed 20 February 2015].

<sup>45</sup> Podany, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> Podany, p. 19.

<sup>47</sup> Podany, p. 19.

Philosophies about restoration and conservation can change, sometimes within a short period of time, as we have seen with the statues of Athena and Hygieia at the Getty. In the words of Jerry Podany, 'These philosophies are as dynamic as time, and as such must be approached with caution.'<sup>48</sup> Although its large torso is all that is left now for the viewer to admire, the *Lansdowne Dionysus* is nonetheless beautiful and compelling. And in its new home at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art it is accessible for the public to enjoy. The drawing by Cavaceppi displayed next to the statue illustrates the tension between presenting the statue as it was when excavated, and the way it may have looked originally in the garden of an ancient Roman villa.

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<sup>48</sup> Podany, p. 21.

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