

THE PYTHIAN APOLLO OF APOLLONIA: A SCULPTURE AFTER THE PRAXITELEAN SCHOOL



Archaeology

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Abstract

The Pythian Apollo is one of most important sculptures found in the ancient Illyrian city of Apollonia. The two parts of this sculpture were found in 1958, within Dwelling "D" during excavations in the sector with the same name. The parts were identified as a unique sculpture on 1964 by Frano Prendi and Hasan Ceka and the study was published in the same year as "Sculptures of Apollonia". This sculpture is dated around century II AD and beginning of century III AD. The Pythian Apollo is linked to a classical statuesque prototype of the century IV BC due to its stylistic features. By following the mentioned studies, and through step by step analysis of all the stylistic elements and forms of the sculpture, and comparison with similar Praxiteles sculptures, this paper reaches the conclusion that the sculpture of Pythian Apollo is made after the Praxitelean School.

The object (inventory no. 13) [Fig. 1] was found in two separate parts, in Apollonia (Illyria) in 1958, inside the dwelling "D", during excavations in the sector with the same name [Fig. 2].¹ In 1964, these two parts enjoyed the right to be finally seen as a single sculpture with the publication of "the Sculptures of Apollonia" (Prendi and Ceka 1964, 28–29, 51, Tab. II). In this article it is called "The Torso of Apollo" and is defined as "It is clear that in this statue we have to deal with the figure of Pythian Apollo, whose cult must have been spread in Apollonia." (Prendi and Ceka 1964, 29). Following this thought, the archaeologist N. Ceka will baptize it with the name "Pythian Apollo" in his book "Apollonia, History and Monuments" (Ceka 2005, 71). Further, it is registered with the same name in "Apollonia d'Illyrie: 1, Atlas archéologique et historique" (Dimo, Lenhardt, and Quantin 2007, 116–18) remaining until today with this *status quo*.

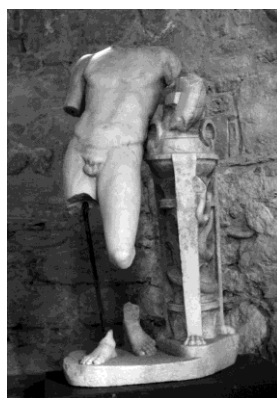


Fig. 1: The Pythian Apollo, Archaeological Museum of Apollonia (photo: I.B.)

¹ The works were carried out by archaeological expeditions of the University of Tirana in cooperation with the Academy of Sciences of USSR, under the lead of N. A. Onaiko and Frano Prendi. See (Islami and Bllavatski 1960, 53, 71–73).

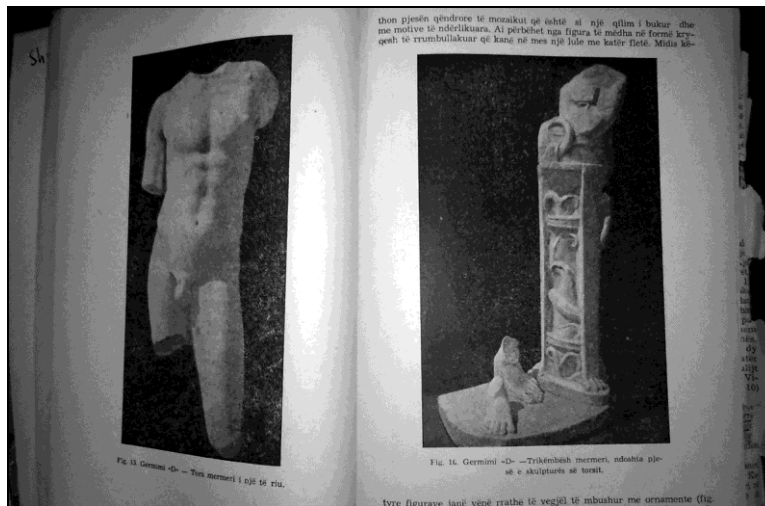


Fig. 2: a: Digging "D": Marble torso of a boy;
b: Digging "D": Marble Tripod, perhaps part of the torso's sculpture (after Islami and Bllavatski 1960)

By following chronically the aforementioned written sources, it is seen that within those, there are also the boundaries of the studies carried out so far about the Object. Originally they appear as an excavation report (Islami and Bllavatski 1960, 53, 71–73). This report describes the places where the two parts of the sculpture were located and their condition, being presented as "the torso of a boy [*Ephēbos* (ἔφηβος)]" and "the base of a statue, possibly of Apollo"(Islami and Bllavatski 1960, 53, 71–73).

The uncertainty drops when the parts are attached to one, transforming into "the Statue of Apollo" in the article of F. Prendi and H. Ceka (Prendi and Ceka 1964, 28–29). In this text, which is the only study on the sculpture in question, the authors elaborate the topic of the description of the work or that of the first level of formal analysis and, here and there, the problems of analysis, interpretation and judgment or those of the other three levels of this analysis (Barrett 2000, 84–86, 113–20, 140–54; Barnet 2014, 48–68).

In other words, the authors describe in details the sculpture's components, both of the torso and of the tripod, their dimensions, the relationship between the forms, the line description, the surface texture, the context of the object, the determination of the subject matter through the designation (naming) of iconographic elements, discussion of how the elements or the structural system helps in the image or function presentation, the portrayal of the movement, and how it has been attained, and at the end, comparing it with other Apollo's statues from the world's museums. From here, it can be concluded that "this work dates back to the century. II or the beginning of the century. III of our era" and "from a stylistic point of view, it relates to a classic stature prototype of the century IV B.C." (Prendi and Ceka 1964, 28–29).

On this study, it is later added that "Pythian Apollo's sculpture is the most interesting among those found inside Dwelling D" (Ceka 2005, 71). Later, in "Apollonia d'Illyrie: 1, Atlas

archéologique et historique", the sculpture's data appear according to the study of the authors Prendi and Ceka, naming it according to designation by N. Ceka (Dimo, Lenhardt, and Quantin 2007, 116–18). Contemplating these aforementioned sources, naturally comes the question of which sculpture's school belongs to this classical stature prototype of the century IV B.C.

Indeed, what would approach us with a correct answer, would be to study those elements that comprise a particular sculpture style and then the name of such a school.

Going back to the comparisons made by the authors Prendi and Ceka [Fig. 3] (Prendi and Ceka 1964, 29), it is observed that, beside the Apollo of the British Museum and that of the Capitoline Museums, our Apollo lacks complexity, extravagance, grotesque and colossal of their form, which are generally marked by excessive decoration and the presence of antagonist elements that convey the sensation of drama, movement and tension. Likewise, beside the deficiency of the stylistic and compositional details of Plovdiv's Apollo, our sculpture is more complicated.

Being far from the Baroque and its opposite, our Apollo gives the first impression that it is made in the style of Praxiteles, as this sculptor had a big influence during antiquity and copies or adoptions of his works always must have been popular, even in times when the tendency of art seems to have been far from his serenity and tenderness (Fowler and Wheeler 1969, 261).



Fig. 3: **a:** Statue of Apollo, Palazzo Nuovo, Capitoline Museums, Rome, Italy; **b:** Apollo Kitharoidos, from the Temple of Apollo at Cyrene, British Museum; **c:** Pythian Apollo of Apollonia (photo: I.B.); **d:** Apollo of Plovdiv (after Tsontchev 1962).

Indeed, in the study of Prendi and Ceka on the sculpture "Torso of a Boy", it is said that "its prototype, born of a combination of elements of Polykleitos and Praxiteles art with reminiscences of Hermes of Andros, we must seek in late Hellenistic period." (Prendi and Ceka 1964, 42–43, Tab. XIV). If we put these sculptures side by side [Fig. 4], can see what are the elements of Polykleitos' art, those of Praxiteles' one, and where these elements are intertwined.

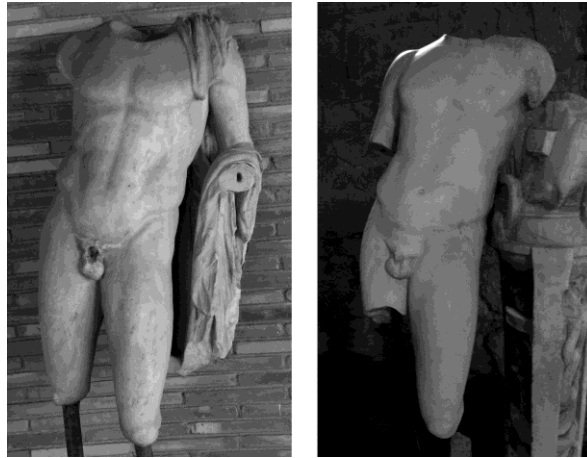


Fig. 4: Two sculptures from Apollonia: 'Torso of a Boy' (after Prendi and Ceka 1964) and 'Pythian Apollo' (photo: I.B.)

Mentioning Polykleitos, recalls the movement of his sculpture or the well-known "contrapposto" (Gardner and Kleiner 2011, 121, 125). In other words, that tendency of the human figure in which one part of the body turns to the opposite of the rest (usually the hips and legs on one side, shoulders and chest in the other), creating a body counterweight around its axis. This canon, which divides the Greek archaic statue from the classic one, is often called "weight shift", because body weight tends to fall on one leg, by creating tension on one side and repose on the other (Gardner and Kleiner 2011, 521).

Both bodies of sculptures in Fig. 4, are composed of a such movement, but in "Pythian Apollo", this "weight shift" goes beyond the stature axis, by introducing another balance scheme, that of Praxiteles (Gardner and Kleiner 2011, 138). In this scheme, made of the Polykleitos canon, the body turns in one side losing its stability and at the same time creating a rhythmic *S* or as otherwise known as the "praxitelean curve" (Richter, Gisela Marie 1929, 197). Consequently, the stature requires a supporter, without which the body position would be nearly impossible to be realized in marble (Fowler and Wheeler 1969, 257).

This supporter becomes the tree trunk to "Apollo Sauroktonos (The Lizard-killer)" [Fig. 5b] (Richter, Gisela Marie 1929, 197), to "Florentine Apollo" [Fig. 5c] (Alinari et al. 1852, 74) and to "Resting Satyr" [Fig. 5d] (Fowler and Wheeler 1969, 259), the trunk, the drapery and infant Dionysos to "Hermes Holding the Infant Dionysos" [Fig. 5e] (Fowler and Wheeler 1969, 257), as well as the delphic tripod of our Apollo [Fig. 5a], playing a dual role. On one hand it is the body's supporter, and on the other hand, through realistic, pictorial and symbolic details, it warns the scene in which the action or event occurs (Fowler and Wheeler 1969, 259).

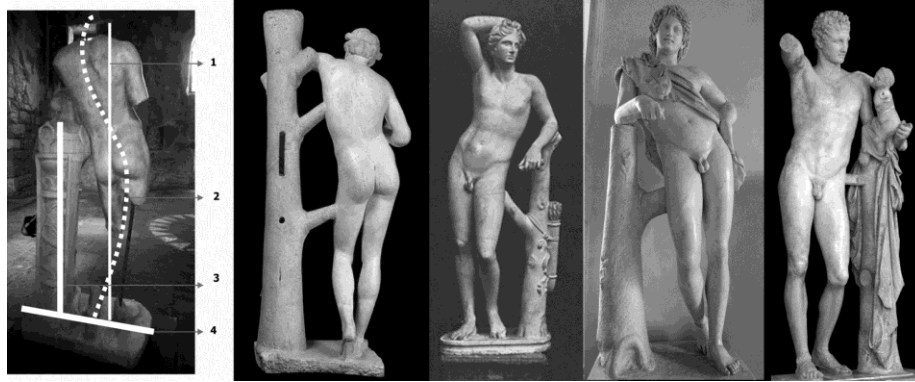


Fig. 5: **a:** Balance scheme of Pythian Apollo: 1.axis, 2. Praxitelean curve, 3. the event / supporter, 4. base; **b:** The Apollo Sauroktonos (The Lizard-killer), Louvre Museum version; **c:** Florentine Apollo (after Alinari et al. 1852); **d:** The Resting Satyr or Leaning Satyr, Palazzo Nuovo, Capitoline Museums, Rome, Italy; **e:** Hermes Holding the Infant Dionysos, Archaeological Museum of Ancient Olympia, Greece.

Opposed to the event / supporter, stands in contrast the nude of a boy, with smooth lines, charming, almost feminine, with well-worked navel and pointed out hips, one of the most preferred themes of Praxiteles (Fowler and Wheeler 1969, 259). These traits of praxitelean nude or of the nude with a smooth flowing harmony (gentle flow) of the delicately modelled surfaces, are quite noticeable in "Pythian Apollo" versus the muscular forms of "Torso of a Boy", which are formed by the combination of sharp edges/angles with thick oval lines [Fig. 4].

This distinction between our sculptures is reinforced even more by the surface polishing of Apollo's sculpture, which is another technical praxitelean element of the form's processing. This sophistication of the form of "Pythian Apollo" stature is also extended to the event / supporter. Thus, if looking at its parts one by one, it is noticed the same workmanship of carving as that of the stature [Fig. 6].

Imitation and interpretation of the inner and concentric lines in the form of pentagons and hexagons with smooth corners in the tortoise-shell lyre or *χέλυς*, the inner part and the its edges, the end of the tripod's feet or the feline (felidae) paws, the carving and the twist of the serpent's shape along the tripod, have been worked with the same care as the boyish body, with a strong move, but not exaggerated, realism in details, but idealism in the concept, which also constitutes the praxitelean spirit (Fowler and Wheeler 1969, 278).

In the last two refinements is also shown a big similarity with the unfinished supporter of a statue with tripod and serpent, found in Athenian Agora from the excavations of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens [Fig. 7] ("Agora Object S 2127" n.d.). This tripod is supposed to be an unfinished copy of the type of Apollo Lykeios statuette of Praxiteles, in Dresden. Noting this similarity, as well as considering the above analysis from which it was seen, through the raised parallels, that "Pythian Apollo" has the scheme and the compositional restraint, the taste for clearly defined contours, sublimating the form (Gemés 2009, 38–59) and making the

characterization of the subject's elements according to the style of Praxiteles, it is concluded that this artwork is made after the Praxitelean School.

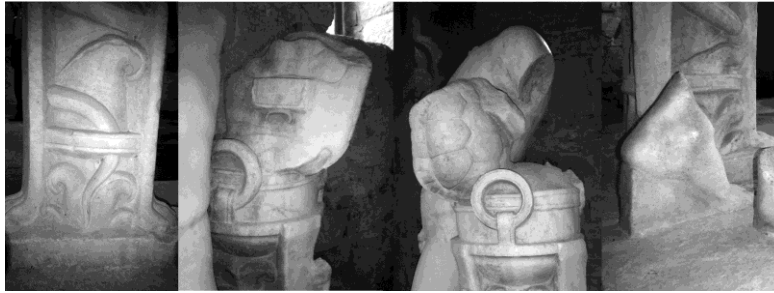


Fig. 6: Fragments of Pythian Apollo (photo: I.B.)



Fig. 7: a: Profile of Pythian Apollo (photo: I.B.); b: Unfinished statue support with tripod and snake (after <http://ascsa.net>)

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