

5 | The Ephebe from the Via dell'Abbondanza History of a Restoration

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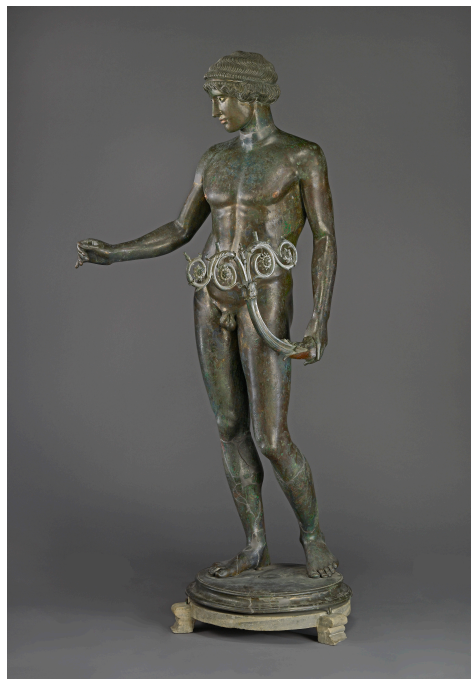


FIGURE 5.1. The Ephebe from the Via dell'Abbondanza, 20–10 B.C. Bronze, 149 × 80 × 55 cm (58⁵/₈ × 31¹/₂ × 21⁵/₈ in.). Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale (inv. 143753)



FIGURE 5.2. The Ephebe at the time of its discovery in 1925

Discovery

The Ephebe from the Via dell'Abbondanza (fig. 5.1) was found in Pompeii by Amedeo Maiuri in 1925.¹ It was discovered in the domus now known as the House of the Ephebe (named for this bronze) or the House of Publius Cornelius Tages (*regio* I.7.11) (fig. 5.2).

The statue, dated to between 20 and 10 B.C., is a version of a mid-fifth-century B.C. Greek figure type. It was brought to light at the left doorpost of the corridor connecting atrium A and room 15 (a tablinum), and was still standing on its circular base, on which two supports for a bronze branch-shaped candelabrum were placed. On the floor by the base were a small altar and four bronze furniture or bed feet.

At the time of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, the Ephebe, the altar, and the bronze feet had been covered with cloth, as indicated by the remains of mineralized fabric that are still visible at several points on the statue (fig. 5.3), as well as by the “copious charred scraps of flax or hemp”² that Maiuri collected during the excavation. That the Ephebe and other items were found this way indicates that the House of the Ephebe was undergoing renovation in A.D. 79. The objects, moved from their usual locations, had been collected and covered with cloth to protect them from dust and damage caused by the work.³

The House of the Ephebe was a typical middle-class home of a family enriched by trade. It is an aggregate of three adjoining houses, marked by opulence and sophistication. The indoor triclinium, which has a beautiful floor in *opus sectile*, is decorated with elegant designs in marble and colored glass paste; the walls are painted in the Fourth Style; and the ceiling is adorned with winged figures in golden stucco. In the famous outdoor triclinium are couches decorated with Nilotic scenes. These were protected from the sun by a pergola supported by four columns, next to which is the cylindrical base on which the bronze Ephebe was originally placed.

As mentioned above, the figure was unearthed still standing on its support. This consists of a hollow bronze Pompeian-style base into which an additional, lower marble base supported by three feet was inserted. The photograph taken at the time of discovery in 1925 shows the statue still partly submerged by lapilli, but perfectly recognizable (fig 5.4). The fracture in the upper



FIGURE 5.3. Remains of the mineralized fabric

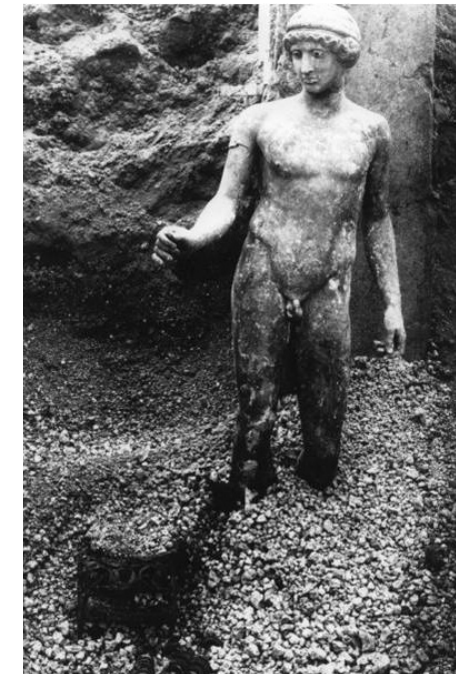


FIGURE 5.4. The Ephebe at the time of its discovery in 1925

right arm is clearly distinguishable. What cannot be seen are the calves and feet, which later proved to be heavily damaged by the weight of volcanic material.

Restoration History

Maiuri accurately described the condition of the Ephebe as it was found: the left leg was broken at the knee and the calf of the right leg was in several fragments due to compression caused by the weight of volcanic debris; “the ancient break of the original cast where the right forearm was connected to the upper arm” had been reopened; the patina was the “well-known characteristic patina of the bronzes from Pompeii, almost perfectly homogenous in the pure oval of the face and in the hair, less so on the rest of the body, where, here and there, especially on the left arm, there is some blooming and bubbling of the metal”; the bronze base was slightly deformed and crushed; and the pupils had been lost.

Maiuri explained the lack of homogeneity in the color of the patina by observing that the statue not only had been adapted for use as a lamp bearer—as evidenced by the flattening of the palms to fit the branches (fig. 5.5)—but also had been gilded. He defined the gilding as “soft,” “achieved not by applying a layer [of gilding] but by immersing the bronze, the precise technique of which eludes us.” As we shall see below, however, the investigations carried out at the Centro di Restauro in Florence have confirmed observations from the Laboratorio di Conservazione e Restauro in Naples, which indicate that this appearance is the result not of gilding but of scrubbing of the metal during aggressive surface cleaning.

The first restoration of the Ephebe was undertaken in 1925, in the Gabinetto dei Restauri of the Naples Museo Archeologico, by the draftsman Michelangelo Puccetti, under Maiuri’s direction. It aimed at “the uniting of the separated parts of the lower limbs, the consolidation of the right forearm, and the addition of a solid internal framework to secure the original ponderation of the figure.”⁴

The photographs from 1925, preserved in the photographic archive of the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, confirm Maiuri’s report. In the photographs the fracture in the upper right arm, visible in the image made at the time of discovery (see fig. 5.4), has been reassembled and camouflaged, as have the fragmented parts of the legs and feet (figs. 5.6a–b). In addition, the surface of the statue and the base is still to be cleaned. Unfortunately, we do not have any documentation following the completion of the restoration that might show the aggressive cleaning that led to the widespread scrubbing that Maiuri had interpreted as gilding. Traces of this work remain visible, as Maiuri said, “here and there on the body and especially under the left arm and, in very shiny patches, on the back” (fig. 5.7). Maiuri’s claim that the Ephebe was gilded is perplexing, given his experience and knowledge of the materials, and leads us to assume that he did not carefully oversee critical operations such as the cleaning of surfaces.



FIGURE 5.5. Flattening of the palm of the right hand



FIGURES 5.6a–b. Front and back view of the Ephebe in 1925, after restoration

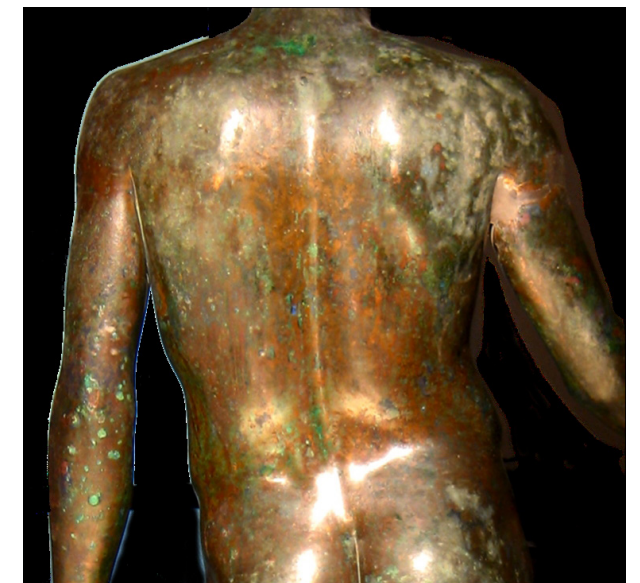


FIGURE 5.7. Abrasion due to the aggressive cleaning carried out in 1925



FIGURE 5.8. Internal armature (brass bars) inserted through legs in 1925

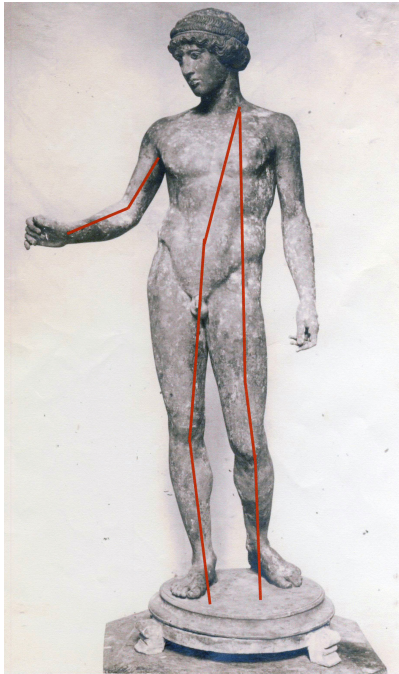


FIGURE 5.9. Arrangement of internal armature inserted in 1925

In any case, the cleaning must have been done immediately after the photography was completed, since Maiuri makes reference to the “gilding” in his publication of the statue (1925–26).

Restoration Techniques

Although the images taken in 1925 are valuable, they provide a limited amount of information. The conservation work carried out in 1996 at the Laboratorio di Conservazione e Restauro at the Museo Archeologico allows us to document the 1925 restoration in more detail. The results, presented here for the first time, add to our understanding of the particular and unusual techniques that were used to restore bronzes at the Naples museum in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Because it was in a precarious condition and at risk of further damage, the statue was dismantled, and this allowed for new research.⁵ It was possible to confirm that the statue was supported by an armature consisting of two brass bars of rectangular section, which are made up of at least two segments. These were shaped and welded with tin solder at the knees (fig. 5.8). One bar was inserted through the left heel and, passing through the leg and thigh, comes up to the left shoulder; the other was inserted through the right foot and continued up to the pelvis, to then bend to the left shoulder, where it joined with the bar from the left (fig. 5.9). The upper ends of both were wrapped with fabric that was attached to the bronze with cement (fig. 5.10). The lower ends were fitted into slots cut into the bronze base, under which were placed wooden strips, filled with pigmented plaster, to distribute the weight of the statue.

To provide stability to the internal support of the Ephebe and to furnish a surface on which to secure the fragments, part of the thighs and the legs were filled with cement (fig. 5.11). To avoid direct contact of the latter with the ancient bronze, an unusual method was used, which, as far as I know, is documented here for the first and only time. Between the inner wall of the statue and the cement was a yellow sateen fabric that protected the ancient metal. Remains of the sateen were also found inside the right foot (fig. 5.12).

The use of cement in bronze statues is attested at around the same time in the restoration of another famous sculpture, the Ephebe of Selinunte (Castelvetrano, Museo Civico). This statue was discovered in 1882 in Sicily—in Ponte Galera, in the territory of Selinunte—and dates from between 480 and 460 B.C. The statue was restored in the laboratory of the Real Museo Archeologico of Syracuse in 1928 by the restorer Giuseppe D’Amico, who, as reported by Pirro Marconi, was the inventor of a quick-setting concrete. Following the investigations conducted by the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro in 1983, this has been revealed to be cement.⁶ The use of cement (or mortar made with gypsum mixed with volcanic sand) not simply as a fill but also as a supporting surface on which to attach fragments during reconstruction has also been well documented in



FIGURE 5.10. Upper end of one of the brass bars, wrapped with fabric and attached to the bronze with cement



FIGURE 5.11. Ephebe’s thigh filled with cement

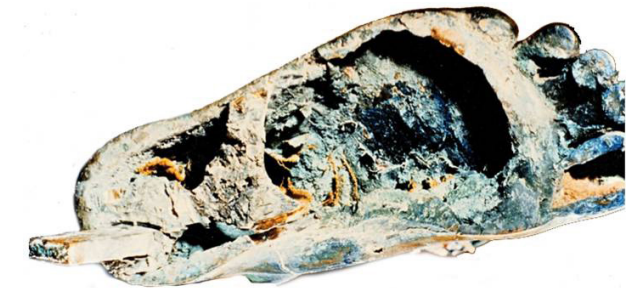


FIGURE 5.12. Remains of sateen found inside Ephebe’s right foot

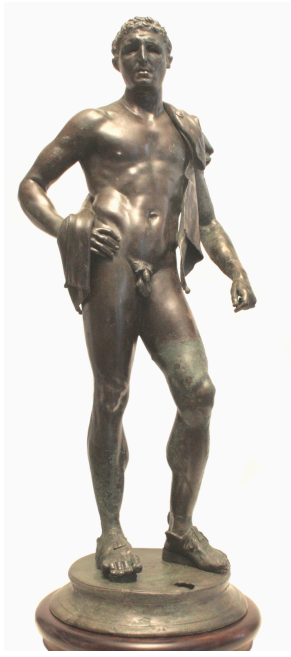


FIGURE 5.13. Bronze statuette of Alexander I Balas (?).
H. (with base) 76.5 cm (30¹/₈ in.). Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale (126170)

the recent restoration of a small bronze sculpture in the Museo Archeologico in Naples. It is a Roman copy of a Hellenistic original of the mid-second century B.C., and represents, perhaps, Alexander I Balas dressed as Hermes (fig. 5.13).⁷ This little statue, found on June 17, 1901, by Antonio Sogliano in the atrium of a house in Pompeii (*regio V. 3*), was restored for the first time in the Naples museum between 1902 and 1908, the year it appeared in Arnold Ruesch's guide to the Museo Archeologico. The left leg, which was detached from the thigh, was reassembled using a technique that is similar, as we shall see below, to that adopted for the right arm of the Ephebe from the Via dell'Abbondanza. The two component parts were joined with cement, and this served as the support for an integration that was made using colored plaster and colophony mixed with metal powder (fig. 5.14).

The weight of the legs of the Pompeian Ephebe, filled with cement during the restoration, was undoubtedly the main cause of the statue's precarious state in 1996. The removal of this harmful filling required careful work, especially given the fragmentary nature of the legs and feet. Particularly delicate was the treatment of the right leg (fig. 5.15), where the calf had broken into several fragments on account of the weight of volcanic material that had buried the statue.

In the leg were found pieces of wood that had been used to secure the brass armature in its correct position prior to the pouring in of the cement. There were also fragments of tightly



FIGURE 5.14. Alexander I Balas: part of thigh, joined with cement



FIGURE 5.15. Right leg of the Ephebe during conservation

woven fabric placed between the cement and ancient bronze. These served the same purpose as the sateen fabric described above. The conservation of the leg has also allowed us to record the traces left by the molds used to cast the statue in antiquity. Similar evidence was also found in the left leg, which was broken at the bend of the limb and at the top of the ankle (fig. 5.16).

The right foot was fractured in several places. It had been filled with concrete and protected with sateen in contact with the ancient wall (see fig. 5.12). A few areas of ancient repair (cold patches) were also documented.

The cleaning of the left foot was of particular interest for the understanding of the treatment of the statue in antiquity. As Maiuri had already observed in 1925, the circular bronze base was not original but had been adapted to the youth. This was confirmed by a significant widening of the space for the pin inside the left heel. It was originally intended to be smaller and rectangular (fig. 5.17).

The system used to secure the right arm at the time of the discovery was complex, and already appeared partially detached at the time of our investigation. Three plates of brass were welded inside the upper arm. In each, two holes were made that corresponded with those that had been made in the shoulder. The assembly was then effected using threaded brass screws (fig. 5.18). A layer of mortar (*malta*) was spread on this armature to make a compact and homogenous surface, on which were placed the ancient patches that masked the join between the shoulder and the arm (fig. 5.19).



FIGURE 5.16. Ephebe's left leg during conservation: traces of the wax-to-wax join between separate sections are visible as the ridge in the center of the image.



FIGURE 5.17. Underside of Ephebe's left foot, showing enlargement of space for pin at the heel



FIGURE 5.18. Brass plates and screws used in the reassembly of right arm



FIGURE 5.19. Join between shoulder and right arm



Finally, the system used by Puccetti to anchor the head of the Ephebe to the body was peculiar. He inserted a support of shaped wood that was fixed into the neck with cement (fig. 5.20). The join between the neck and head was then masked with a pigmented grout.

Recent Conservation and Definition of Ancient Manufacture

In 1998 the Ephebe was transferred from the Museo Archeologico in Naples to the Centro di Restauro at the Museo Archeologico in Florence, in order to conduct surveys that had not been made in Naples and to finish the conservation work for the exhibition “—qual era tutto rotto”: *L’enigma dell’Idolino di Pesaro, indagini per un restauro* (Florence, 1998–99).⁸ The work that was carried out in Florence consisted mainly of a thorough cleaning of the exterior surface, the removal of excess cement that had remained within the sculpture since 1925, and the replacement of the internal brass armature. The new support consisted of a steel disk crossed by two bars that run up the legs, secured with resin and plates bolted at the knees and near the ankles. A layer of silicone was placed between the ancient base and the steel disk to ensure a better fit between the parts. The support thus minimizes the weight put on the Ephebe’s fragile legs and on the bronze base. The cleaning also brought to light the original copperplates used in the lips and nipples. Fragments of copper wire used for the lashes were also found inside one of the eyes.

The radiographic examinations undertaken in Florence have finally allowed us to evaluate the well-preserved metal, and have also provided useful information regarding the manufacture of the Ephebe. It was an indirect lost-wax cast, as demonstrated by, among other things, the chaplet holes and the traces left by the sections of the molds in the arms and legs (which were already documented during the restoration in Naples in 1996). Radiographs also allowed us to identify the different parts in which the statue was cast: the head, the arms, the chest with the right leg, the left leg, the genitals, and the extremities of the feet.

FIGURE 5.20. Wood support inserted into the neck in 1925

- 1 Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 143753; A. Maiuri, "L'Efebo di Via dell'Abbondanza a Pompei," *Bollettino d'arte*, 2nd ser., 4, no. 8 (1925–26), pp. 337–53; W. Amelung, "Bronzener Ephebe aus Pompei," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 42 (1927), pp. 137–51, pls. 11–23; *Le collezioni del Museo Nazionale di Napoli*, vol. 2 (Rome, 1989), p.146, no. 252; H. Hiller, "Zum Xantener Bronzeknaben," in *Akten der 10. Internationalen Tagung über antike Bronzen, Freiburg, 18–22 Juli 1988* (Stuttgart, 1994), pp. 203–4, fig. 7; W.-D. Heilmeyer, *Der Jüngling von Salamis* (Mainz, 1996), pp. 40–43, pl. 67; M. Iozzo, ed., "—qual era tutto rotto": *Lenigma dell'Idolino di Pesaro, indagini per un restauro*, exh. cat. (Florence: Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 1998), pp. 36–38, pl. XVII.
- 2 Maiuri, "Efebo di Via dell'Abbondanza" (note 1), p. 337.
- 3 A number of other bronze statues from Pompeii were discovered in temporary or alternative locations. The Ephebe found on November 27, 1900, in the Fondo Barbatelli, near Porta Vesuvio, had been placed with its spiral-shaped lamp in a service room together with other objects; see A. Sogliano, "L'Efebo in bronzo rinvenuto a Pompei," *Monumenti antichi dei Lincei* 10 (1901), pp. 641ff., pls. XVI–XXVI; P. Zanker, *Klassizistische Statuen: Studien zur Veränderung des Kunstgeschmacks in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Mainz, 1974), pp. 37–38, no. 34; *Collezioni del Museo Nazionale di Napoli*, vol. 2 (note 1), p. 146, no. 251. The lamp bearer from the House of Julius Polybius (*regio IX.13.1–3*), discovered in 1977, was found in the triclinium northwest of the peristyle, where it had been temporarily placed together with other objects while renovations in the house were underway; see F. Zevi, "Apollo *lychnouchos* rinvenuto a Pompei nella Casa di Giulio Polibio," in *Media Saecula '91, 17–22 giugno 1991, Roma, Complesso monumentale di S. Michele a Ripa* (Rome, 1991), p. 30; S. Ensoli Vittozzi, "Apollo lampadoforo," in *Riscoprire Pompei*, ed. L. Franchi Dell'Orto and A. Varone (Rome, 1993), pp. 262–64; C. C. Mattusch, ed., *Pompeii and the Roman Villa: Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2008), pp. 141–43 (with bibliography).
- 4 All quotations of Mauri in this essay are from his "Efebo di Via dell'Abbondanza" (note 1), pp. 338–40.
- 5 Conservation work, disassembly, and temporary reassembly of the Ephebe were directed by the author and executed by the conservator Giovanni Cirella, whom I thank for the valuable collaboration. The photographic documentation of 1996 was carried out by Gennaro Morgese.
- 6 On the Ephebe of Selinunte, see P. Marconi, "Palermo: Restauro della statua bronzea d'arte greca detta 'L'Efebo di Selinunte,'" *Bollettino d'arte del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione*, 2nd ser., 8 (1928), pp. 231–36; A. M. Carruba, "Der Ephebe von Selinunt," *Boreas: Münstersche Beiträge zur Archäologie* 6 (1983), pp. 44–60, pls. 1–6 (with bibliography).
- 7 On the bronze statuette of Alexander I Balas(?) (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 126170), see A. Sogliano, "Pompei: Relazione sugli scavi eseguiti durante il mese di giugno 1901," *Notizie degli scavi di antichità comunicate alla R. Accademia dei Lincei* (1901), pp. 209–304; A. Ruesch, ed., *Guida illustrata del Museo Nazionale di Napoli* (Naples, 1908), p. 200; G. M. A. Richter, *The Portraits of the Greeks* (London, 1965), vol. 3, p. 271; *Collezioni del Museo Nazionale di Napoli*, vol. 2 (note 1), p. 140, no. 220; F. Carlomagno, "Statuetta di principe ellenistico come Mercurio (Alessandro I Balas?)," in *Ritratti: Le tante facce del potere*, ed. E. La Rocca and C. Parisi Presicce, with A. Lo Monaco, exh. cat. (Rome: Musei Capitolini, 2011), p. 315. The conservation was carried out in 2011 at the Laboratorio di Conservazione e Restauro of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples by the conservator Marina Vecchi in collaboration with the graduate student Lisa Massa, under the direction of the author.
- 8 The conservation at the Centro di Restauro in Florence was directed by Mario Iozzo, then deputy director of the center, and executed by the conservator Giuseppe Venturini. Contributors were Roberto Pecchioli (X-rays), Marcello Miccio (analysis of patina), and Antonino Sentineri (photographic evidence). The internal support was designed and built by Giuseppe Venturini and Piergiorgio Nagrini. I thank Dr. Iozzo and Giuseppe Venturini for generously providing me with information about the work carried out in Florence.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

Fig. 5.1: J. Paul Getty Museum with permission from Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei

Figs. 5.2, 5.4, 5.6a-b: Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, Archivio Fotografico

Figs. 5.3, 5.5, 5.7–5.20: Courtesy of the Laboratory for Conservation and Restoration at the National Archaeological Museum, Naples