



TRIUMPH OF DIONYSUS IN INDIA ON AN UNPUBLISHED UNIQUE TERRACOTTA PLAQUE IN EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to bring to scholarly attention a terracotta decorated plaque from Alexandria, which is kept in the Cairo Egyptian Museum. inv.

7	8
27	3

This is a rectangular plaque with high reliefs, showing some evidence of remaining color. It has a mythological theme "triumph of Dionysus in India". The myth of Dionysus and his campaign against India as well as his victorious return was depicted during the Hellenistic era because it served as a prototype for the victories of Alexander the Great. Some believed that Alexander the Great followed the god's footsteps that guided him until he reached India. He also claimed that he was a descendant of Dionysus and took him as an example to emulate. The triumph of Dionysus in India was also depicted in the Roman era to symbolize the victorious ruler defeating his enemies, and to indicate the joy of victory among his followers. Moreover, this theme has a religious significance as it is related to the victory advocated by Roman doctrine, as a common topic frequently represented since the end of the second century AD. This article uses a descriptive and analytical study to answer many questions related to the function of the plaque. Questions such as, Was it a separate plaque that hung on the wall or a part of something larger? Was this scene associated with specific myths or festivals, and what were these festivals? Did this scene appear in other art forms such as mosaics and sarcophagi and what were the differences between them? This article will also include an analysis of all the characters in the scene to ascertain whether the characters present in the scene differ from those in the mosaics and sarcophagi and whether they can be used to date this plaque?

KEYWORDS

Plaque- Dionysus god- Dionysus Followers –Heracles- Festivals of Dionysus- Triumph of Dionysus in India.

المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إلقاء الضوء على لوحة ملونة من الطين جاءت من الإسكندرية محفوظة في المتحف المصري بالقاهرة تحت رقم مؤقت

7	8
27	3

وهي عبارة عن لوحة مستطيلة ذات نقوش بارزة ملونة في بعض الأجزاء. تزخرف بموضوع أسطوري "انتصار ديونيسوس في الهند". تتناول هذه الدراسة اللوحة من خلال دراسة وصفية وتحليلية. كما تجيب على العديد من الأسئلة المتعلقة بوظيفة هذه اللوحة؟ وهل هي لوحة منفصلة معلقة على الحائط أم جزء من شيء ما؟ هل كان هذا المشهد مرتبطاً باحتفالات معينة، وما هي هذه الاحتفالات؟ هل صور هذا المشهد على فنون أخرى مثل الفسيفساء والتوابيت؟ وما الفرق في طريقة التصوير؟ مع تحليل جميع الشخصيات في المشهد المصور وسبب وجودهم في هذا المشهد. وهل اختلفت الشخصيات الموجودة في المشهد باختلاف الآثار التي صورت فيها؟ بالإضافة إلى تاريخ هذه اللوحة.

الكلمات الدالة

لوحة - إله ديونيسوس - اتباع ديونيسوس - هيراكليس - احتفالات ديونيسوس - انتصار ديونيسوس في الهند.

Introduction:

The depiction of the triumph of Dionysus in India was a common theme during the Hellenistic and Roman eras and appeared in various art forms, such as the sarcophagi and mosaics, whether inside or outside Egypt. This plaque has particular importance as it is a rare artefact depicting the triumph of Dionysus in India and dating back to the Roman era from which no similar plaques have been found. It is an almost identical depiction of the scene which has been found on sarcophagi. It may be possible that this plaque was a copy of sarcophagi reliefs. The plaque also represents an important subject which was depicted during the Roman period, where it was used in some cases as a symbol of worshipping the victorious ruler.

DESCRIPTION (FIG. 1, A, B, C)

Dimensions: 0.21 × 0.40 m.

Material: bright and well-polished brown terracotta with traces of blue color in the background of the whole scene. The plaque is rectangular in shape and generally in good condition, except for the lower central section and the left side which have been restored with evidence of some filling behind the chariot group and within the altar group. Greenish-yellow and black coloring can be seen in some places.

Provenance: Alexandria.

The plaque has two holes, on the upper right and left sides. It is decorated with high reliefs depicting Dionysus riding the biga, completely naked except for a mantle hanging on his left thigh. He wears a Mitra on his head, and appears to be drunk because he leans back, turns his head to the right, and holds a kantharos in his hand. He leans on a bald naked Silenus with a curly beard and moustache. The lower part of Silenus is unclear due to the presence of scratches in the panel. Maenad supports him from the other side, her body is depicted in a three-quarter view, while her head is depicted as viewed from the side. She wears a chiton and holds a thyrsus.

The chariot group shows a biga drawn by two centaurs. The first one's body is depicted from the side, his hair is short, and his head is raised to enable him to blow into the trumpet-like instrument (salpinx) which he holds high. He has defined muscles in his chest, abdomen, and arms. The second centaur is depicted in a three-quarter view, with short hair. There is a cloak on his shoulder. He has a muscular chest and abdomen as well as his arms. He is holding a rectangular object in his right hand that may be a sistrum, while in his left hand, he holds a lyre. There is panther skin draped down the front of his body similar to that which was used as a saddle on Roman horses in military and hunting scenes. The Centaur appears to be moving as can be seen from the position of his legs. A panther is depicted in a side view below the feet of the second Centaur and its head is turned to look back over its shoulder as it moves forward.

The scene on the left hand of the plaque shows a quasi-independent group, immediately behind the Silenus figure. The group comprises a naked Satyr except for a cloak that falls across his back to wrap over the right thigh. His hair is short and his body is depicted from the side with his abdomen being shown as lacking any tone. He holds a black bodied kantharos with a yellow rim and handles, in his left hand which he passes to a well-muscled male figure, while in his right hand he holds a staff. The male figure is depicted in three-quarter view, with a naked chest and belly with a cloak wrapped around the lower part of his body. The man holds what may be a lion skin in his right hand, a large portion of it is destroyed and only the lower part and legs are visible. It is possible that this man is Heracles. There is a rectangular altar with a base and crown with offerings between the satyr and Heracles. There is a badly damaged image of a child under Heracles' foot, from

which only its head and hand appear due to the heavy scratches in this area. The child holds fruits to offer them on the altar and it may represent one of those children depicted in Dionysus' procession known as Bacchic boys.

A Maenad wearing a purple chiton with her hair twisted and pulled back firmly is depicted in three-quarter view behind Heracles. She is standing behind a palm tree on which she rests her hand. Its' trunk is rising from below the scene. The palm trunk from below to covers the lower part of her body. This particular image apparently shows that this plaque depicts a scene of triumph of Dionysus in India.

THE TRIUMPH OF DIONYSUS IN INDIA

The story of Dionysus in India begins with Zeus ordering Dionysus to travel to India, as the inhabitants refuse to worship him. The Indians stubbornly preferred their ancestral gods of fire and water, and they refuse to drink wine, Dionysus's "care-forgetting vintage". Dionysus then gathers a huge army. As it marches across the ancient world to India, he also collects several lovers. His foe is Deriades, ruler of India and son of the Jhelum River (where Alexander had fought Porus centuries before). Deriades, being half river himself, drinks only water. He despises Dionysus's drink, insisting that "my wine is the spear". Helped by Brahmins versed in sorcery, Deriades fights several battles with Dionysus before finally caving to the god's power.¹

The theme of the triumph of Dionysus in India is of great importance as it was mentioned in many sources and was portrayed both on sarcophagi and mosaics, as was stated earlier.² Pausanias mentioned that Dionysus was the first one to invade India and the first to bridge the river Euphrates³. This was also depicted on several mosaics, in Rome, North Africa⁴, Spain⁵, and Egypt⁶, and it was used in some cases as a symbol of worshipping the victorious ruler⁷. The myth of Dionysus and his campaign in India, with his triumphant return, is one of the favorite subjects to be portrayed since the Hellenistic era. It is analogous to the true victory of Alexander in his campaigns in Asia Minor from 327 to 326 BC⁸, Alexander took Dionysus as an example to follow in his campaigns and linked Dionysus' campaign against India and his own campaign in the East.⁹

ARTISTIC STUDY

1- The Chariot Group

Dionysus depicted on a biga being pulled by two Centaurs appears on some cameos during the Hellenistic period at the end of the 1st century BC - beginning of 1st century AD. An example is the Sardonyx Cameo, 1st Century BC¹⁰ (Fig. 2B), 4.2 x 2.7 cm, is from

¹ <https://thewire.in/books/greek-god-dionysus-dionysiaca-nonnus>.

² Prop. 3.17, 21-22; Virg. Egl. 5, 29; Aen. 6, 804-805; Ovid. Ars I, 549-550; Sil. 17, 645-648; Luc. Bacch. I; Nonnos Dion. 40 ss.

³ Paus, Desc. Gree 10. 29. 4.

⁴ Dunbabin, K., "The Triumph of Dionysus on Mosaics in North Africa", in: *Papers of the British School at Rome*, Vol. 39 (1971), pl. XII- XV.

⁵ Montegudo, G., "The Triumph of Dionysus in Two Mosaics in Spain", in: *Assaph: Studies in Art History* 4, University of Tel-Aviv, (1999), 35-60.

⁶ Ovadiah. A., et.al, "The Mosaic Pavements of Sheikh Zouede", Tesserac, in: *Festschrift für Josef Engemann, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentums, Ergänzungsband*, 18, (1991) 181-191.

⁷ Pollitt, J., *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, Cambridge, (1986), 214.

⁸ Alexander, Ch., "A Roman Silver Relief: the Indian Triumph of Dionysus", *MMAB* 14, 3, (1955), 64.

⁹ Goyette, M., "Ptolemy II Philadelphus and the Dionysiac Model of Political Authority", *JAEL*, 2, 1, (2010), 3.

¹⁰ <https://artblart.com/tag/cameo-triumph-of-dionysus>.

Alexandria and can now be found in the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. It depicts Dionysus lying on a biga and holding a thyrsus. The biga is pulled by two Centaurs, one a male playing a flute and the other a female.

There is another cameo (Fig. 3) from France and preserved in the National Bibliotheque of France, dating back to the Hellenistic era at the end of the first century BC¹. It depicts a naked Dionysus, holding a thyrsus, in a state of drunkenness, supported by Ariadne, with Eros appearing behind them. They are riding a biga which is pulled by two Centaurs. One of them plays on the lyre, while the other raises his arm upwards. Eros advances, holding a torch. In addition to the example of this design on cameos is a part of a terracotta bread stamp (Fig. 4) which came from Egypt and is preserved in the Fouquet collection. It dates to the Hellenistic era and has a small gripe from the back. A bearded Dionysus is depicted with Ariadne next to him on the biga, pulled by two Centaurs. The first plays on the double flute while Eros sits on it².

The depiction of the triumph of Dionysus in India continued during the Roman era, whether on sarcophagi or mosaics. There are many examples, including: reliefs of a marble sarcophagus (Fig. 5), from Campania, which is kept in The Naples National Archaeological Museum, inv. 6776, dating to around 200 AD³. Dionysus is depicted on the left, drunken, supported by a Satyr and riding a biga pulled by two Centaurs. This scene is similar to our plaque in depicting the first Centaur, playing on a musical instrument, which is the flute, but in our plaque the Centaur blows the trumpet. As for the second Centaur, the body is depicted in the same way, in terms of the profile of lower part, while the upper part is depicted in three-quarter view with the head tilted back. It also holds a harp and sistrum as in the two examples. The goat's head protrudes from the side of the second Centaur's body, but the difference lies in the size of the body as the Centaurs in our plaque have large and wide bodies as well as distinctive musculature.

In our example, the Centaur appears without a beard or moustache, while in the sarcophagus sculptures, the second Centaur was executed with a beard and moustache with Eros on its back. As for Dionysus, his depiction in our example differs from the sarcophagus as he is depicted with his body lying on Silenus, who supports him with the Maenad, while on the sarcophagus, Dionysus was depicted standing and resting upon a Satyr. The two scenes are also similar in the way they depict a panther under the second Centaur, as well as being depicted with a side view of the body and the head turned backwards.

Another example of a marble sarcophagus, (Fig. 6) was kept in Naples, in The National Archaeological Museum, inv. 6693, dating back to 160-170 AD⁴. It depicts a triumph of Dionysus, on the left, a drunken Dionysus, is shown holding a kantharos and stands in a biga drawn by two Centaurs, one of which is playing the lyre. Eros stands on the back of the male Centaurs. In the center, Pan is shown between two Maenads. Another example is a Roman marble sarcophagus (Fig. 7) Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, Inv. GR. 1.1835. which dates back to 150 AD⁵. This shows a drunken Dionysus wearing a panther skin, and

¹ Babelon, E., *Camees antiques et modernes de la Bibliotheque Nationale*, (1897), 46, no. 79, pl. IX.

² Perdrizet, P., *les terres cuites grecques d'égypte de la collection fouquet*, II, Paris, (1921), 83, pl. LXVII, no. no. 198.

³ Koch, G. und Sichtermann, H., *Römische Sarkophage*, German, (1982), 192, Fig. 226; LIMC, III, 2, Amor/Cupid, 336; Zanker, P. & Ewald, B.C., *Living with Myths: The Imagery of Roman Sarcophagi*, trans. by Slater, J., Oxford, (2012), 138.

⁴ Leveritt, W., *Dionysian triumph sarcophagi*. PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, (2016), B1.

⁵ Matz, F., "Die Dionysischen Sarkophage", 2, *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs*, 4, 2, (1968), no. 129; LIMC, 469.

holding a thyrsus, supported by a Satyr and riding a biga pulled by two centaurs. One more example of a marble tomb loculus or cover slab (Fig. 8) Roman Gallery Museum, which dates to 2nd or 3rd century AD¹. It depicts a drunk Dionysus stands in the biga with a Satyr supporting him. He wears a panther skin and a wreath made from bunches of grapes and holding a thyrsus. The biga is being pulled by two centaurs. One of them is blowing the salpinx and the other is holding the kithara in one hand and a sistrum in the other, with Eros on his back. A panther is depicted below his feet similar to our plaque.

Another Roman Sarcophagus, (FIG. 9) kept in Casino Rospigliosi, Rome, dates to 150 AD. It shows a drunk Dionysus riding in his chariot and leaning on Silenus. Centaurs with musical instruments are pulling the chariot. A chubby putto rides a lion, while Pan dances over an open cista mystica².

The triumph of Dionysus in India appeared on North African, and Egyptian mosaics through the Roman period. There are nine pavements in north Africa which depicts Dionysus' triumph. Only one of them depicts Dionysus riding alone in the biga drawn by a pair of centaurs but the others are drawn by a pair of tigresses³ such as a mosaic from Acholla, in the baths of Trajan, the frigidarium (Fig.9) Tunis, Bardo Museum, it dates to 120- 130 AD. In the center is Dionysus in a biga which is pulled by two centaurs⁴.

An Egyptian mosaic depicting the return of Dionysus triumphant from India came from Sheikh Zouéde, and is preserved in the Ismailia Museum, and dates back to the middle of the fourth century to the middle of the fifth century AD⁵.

2- Heracles

Heracles was portrayed in the procession of Dionysus' triumphant return from India for several reasons: Heracles was an old friend of Dionysus and they are shown banqueting together on Greek vases⁶. The legends talk about two Greek heroes who come to India, these are Dionysus and Heracles. Strabo said that the expedition of Dionysus and Heracles to India looked like a mythical story⁷. Pliny the Elder mentioned that Alexander the Great conquered India like Dionysus and Heracles⁸. Dionysus is said to have come before Heracles and taught the Indians to plant, cook, and build cities⁹. They are children of Zeus from a mortal woman, Heracles from Alcmene¹⁰, and Dionysus from Semele.¹¹ Dionysus and Heracles are exceptional gods although there is an informal rule that, if you have one divine parent and one human parent, then you are a human generally a hero and not a god. But there were two exceptions to this rule. Heracles who became a god and was taken up to

¹ White, W., "View of the Horse from the Classical Perspective The Penn Museum Collection", in: *Expedition*, 53, 3, 31, no. 13.

² Matz, "Die dionysischen Sarkophage", *SarkRel*, IV, 2, (1975), Tafel 69.1; Meadows-Rogers, R., "Procession and Return: Bacchus, Poussin, and the Conquest of Ancient Territory", *Athanas*, Vol. 9, 1990, fig. 6; Leveritt, *Dionysian triumph sarcophagi*, B16.

³ Dunbabin, "Triumph of Dionysus", 53.

⁴ Dunbabin, "Triumph of Dionysus", 53; [https://www.directbooking.ro/landmark-bardo-museum-281.aspx#photo\[obiectiv\]/1/](https://www.directbooking.ro/landmark-bardo-museum-281.aspx#photo[obiectiv]/1/), 12-10- 2020.

⁵ Ovadia, et. al, "The Mosaic Pavements of Sheikh", 181-191.

⁶ Zanker & Ewaid, *Living with Myths*, 137.

⁷ Strab, Geo, 11. 5. 5.

⁸ *Plin. Nat. Hist*, 4. 39.

⁹ Karłowicz, D., "On the necessity of Dionysus: the return of Hephaestus as a tale of the god that alone can solve unresolvable conflicts and restore an inconsistent whole", in Karłowicz, D & Doroszewski, F (eds.), *Dionysus and Politics: Constructing Authority in the Graeco-Roman World*, New York, (2021), 41.

¹⁰ Eur. He. 1.

¹¹ Hom. Hymn. vi. 56; Hes. Th. 940-942; Eurip. Bacch. init.; Apollod. iii. 4.

Mount Olympus upon his death and Dionysus who insisted that he was always a god maybe because he was born from Zeus' thigh.¹

The two were cursed with madness by Hera and as a result, Heracles killed his wife and children and was subsequently purified for this murder. He then performed his twelve labors for Eurystheus². Dionysus leaves his place and wandered far and wide³.

Heracles is depicted in the procession of Dionysus' triumphant return from India in two ways: the first one shows him as being drunk in many examples such as (Fig. 5) and reliefs of a marble sarcophagus (Fig. 10) from Lyon in France, dating back to 3rd century AD, and kept in The Lyon Gallo-Roman Museum.⁴ In the second one, he is shown sober as in our plaque and many examples of sarcophagi where it is one of the scenes that is rarely depicted. An example of this can be seen in reliefs from a marble sarcophagus in Woburn Abbey, dating back to 210-220 AD⁵ (Fig. 11). Here it shows Heracles sober and not drunken, holding his club in one hand and kantharos in the other. Leveritt mentioned that Heracles was depicted in the procession of Dionysus in two forms, either sober or drunk, but sober is rare compared to his depiction as drunk. Therefore, he must be represented as strong and muscular to indicate the victorious warrior who wandered in foreign lands in support of Dionysus to spread a new and better age⁶. In the case of depicting him as balanced, he must be depicted as muscular, instead of leaning on the club, waving it to symbolize victory and following Dionysus all over the earth⁷.

The same is depicted in our plaque, as he is holding the lion's skin from its mane, and this indicates his strength instead of putting the lion's skin on his back or on his arm to indicate strength. According to Pliny, this is called *Heracles triumphalis*⁸. In addition to his depiction as being drunk which is in the Roman style⁹.

3- The panther

Depicting animals in the scene of triumph in India indicates the control Dionysus has over animals and their obedience to him¹⁰. These animals included the panther which is represented in the scenes of triumph of Dionysus in India on the sarcophagi. The panther or leopard was one of Dionysus' favorite animals because it stepped gracefully just as the followers of Dionysus did. He loved the panther just like he did wine. He may have been associated with it due to its brutality, which was compared to that of Dionysus. The panther or leopard was considered one of the animals which accompanied Dionysus, and the skin of the panther was considered one of the attributes to both him and his followers, especially the Maenad.¹¹

¹ Mellenthin, J., & Shapiro, S.O, *Mythology Unbound: An Online Textbook for Classical Mythology*, Utah State University, (2017), 90.

https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/oer_textbooks/5.

² Mellenthin & Shapiro, *Mythology Unbound: An Online Textbook for Classical Mythology*, 116.

³ Bell, R., *Place Names in Classical Mythology Greece*, Chicago, (1989). 81.

⁴ Le Mer, A & Chomer, C., *Carte archéologique de la Gaule*, Lyon, Paris, (2007), 664.

⁵ LIMC, Bacchus, 246; Matz, "Die dionysischen Sarkophage," 239-341, no. 100; McCann, A., "Two Fragments of Sarcophagi in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Illustrating the Indian Triumph of Dionysus", in: *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 36, (1977), 136, fig. 19.

⁶ Leveritt, *Dionysian triumph sarcophagi*, 182.

⁷ Verg. Aen. 6.791-801. See also: Leveritt, *Dionysian triumph sarcophagi*, 182.

⁸ Plin. HN 34.33.

⁹ Leveritt, *Dionysian triumph sarcophagi*, 183.

¹⁰ Leveritt, *Dionysian triumph sarcophagi*, 6.

¹¹ Otto, W., *Dionysus Myth and Cult, India*, (1995), 111; Pinckernelle, K., *The Iconography of Ancient Greek and Roman Jewellery*, Master of Philosophy, University of Glasgow History of Art, (2007), 32; Friedman,

4- The Biga

It is one of the main elements in the scene of Dionysus' triumphant return from India. It was depicted being pulled by two centaurs on many works of art. (Fig. 2a, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9). As for the Biga on which Dionysus rode, K. Dunbabin maintained that it could be pulled by two centaurs, panthers, leopards, or elephants.¹ However, during the Severan era, the carriage on which Dionysus was riding was drawn by elephants or deer in the procession, and this appeared on the Roman sarcophagi².

5- The Depicted Theme:

The theme of the triumph of Dionysus in India is of great importance as it was mentioned through many sources and was portrayed both on sarcophagi and mosaics as it was stated earlier³. Pausanias mentioned that Dionysus was the first one to invade India and the first to bridge the river Euphrates⁴. It was also depicted on several mosaics, whether in Rome, North Africa⁵, Spain⁶, and Egypt⁷, as it was used in some cases as a symbol of worshipping the victorious ruler⁸. The myth of Dionysus and his campaign on India and his triumphant return is one of the favorite subjects to be portrayed since the Hellenistic era. It is analogous to the true victory of Alexander in his campaigns on Asia Minor from 327 to 326 BC⁹, who took him as an example to follow in his campaigns and linked Dionysus' campaign against India and his campaign in the East¹⁰.

The colors

Our plaque has three colors; blue, black, and greenish-yellow, which are among the basic colors that the ancient Egyptian used to color paintings and continued into the Roman period. The blue color is used in the background to enhance the brilliance of other colors¹¹. It was known as Egyptian blue and was used extensively as a blue pigment across the

W., "A Roman Panther Handle in the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard Art Museums", in: *Fogg Art Museum*, (1966 – 1967), 50.; Barringer, J., *The Hunt in Ancient Greece*, London, (2001), 78f.

¹ Dunbabin, "Triumph of Dionysus", 61-62.

² McCann, "Two Fragments of Sarcophagi", 131

³ Prop. 3.17, 21-22; Virg. Egl. 5, 29; Aen. 6, 804-805; Ovid. Ars I, 549-550; Sil. 17, 645-648; Luc. Bacch. I; Nonnos Dion. 40 ss.

⁴ Paus, Desc. Gree 10. 29. 4.

⁵ Dunbabin, "The Triumph of Dionysus", pl. XII- XV.

⁶ Monteagudo, "The Triumph of Dionysus", 35-60.

⁷ Ovadia, et.al, "The Mosaic Pavements of Sheikh Zouede", 181-191.

⁸ Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, 214.

⁹ Alexander, "A Roman Silver Relief", 64.

¹⁰ Goyette, "Ptolemy II Philadelphus and the Dionysiac", 3.

¹¹ There is archaeological evidence of the use of Egyptian blue through the ages. In the Bronze age was used in wall paintings of Thera, Knossos, and Mycenae. Also, Egyptian blue was widely used during antiquity, spreading all around the Mediterranean basin until the 7th century AD. Egyptian blue was successfully produced from the fourth dynasty, this pigment was made by mixing calcium salt (carbonate, sulfate, or hydroxide), copper compounds (oxide or malachite), sand (silica), and alkali flux materials (natron salts from Wadi Natrun, or soda-rich plant ashes). See: Brecoulaki, H., "Precious Colour" in *Ancient Greek Polychromy and Painting: Material Aspects and Symbolic Values*. *Rev. Arch*, 57, (2014), 10f.; 3- 35; Marketou, A., et. al, "Egyptian Blue Pellets from the First Century BCE Workshop of Kos (Greece): Microanalytical Investigation by Optical Microscopy, Scanning Electron Microscopy-X-ray Energy Dispersive Spectroscopy and Micro-Raman Spectroscopy", in: *Minerals*, 10, 1063, (2020), 2; Mahmoud, H., "Characterization of Pigments", in: Sandra, L& López, V. (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Sciences*, New York, (2018), 1-6; Bourgeois, B& Jeammet, V., "La polychromie des terres cuites grecques: approche matérielle d'une culture picturale", in: *Revue Archéologique*, 69, 1, 11; Afifi, H., "Analytical Investigation of Pigments", *Ground Layer and Media of Cartonnage fragments from Greek Roman Period*, in: *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, 11, 2, (2011), 29.

ancient Mediterranean world to the seventh century AD¹. The black color² is used in our plaque in Heracles's hair, Maenad's hair, Silenus's beard, and the body of the kantharos. It is used as a basic color in coloring hair, toupees, and beards³. Greenish-yellow color is used in our plaque in some attributes and instruments such as thyrsus, Metra, clothes and branches, the trumpet, and a part of the kithara⁴.

The Function

We can deduce that our plaque is a votive plaque through the two holes in its back, the rectangular shape, and the nature of the subject depicted on it, where the votive plaques were small and rectangular like our plaque, they were usually made of colored terracotta, painted wood, ivory, marble and bronze that served as a votive object in a sanctuary or a burial chamber. It has holes that were used to hang them within the sanctuary on walls, tombs, and trees⁵. It was known during the Archaic and Classical eras and continued in the Hellenistic period, there are many terracotta plaques found in tombs such as two found in a tomb in Athens, which are preserved in the Boston Museum of Art, and date back to the mid sixth century BC⁶.

This plaque was attached to the wall through the two holes in the plaque, maybe it was used in a temple or a house in Alexandria. Dionysus was one of the most important deities that were worshiped in Egypt during the Greek and Roman eras, specifically in Alexandria and villages of the Fayoum. The Ptolemaic kings were interested in worshipping the god Dionysus during the third century BC⁷, when Ptolemy II Philadelphus claimed that he was a descendant of the god Dionysus⁸ and established a temple for him in Alexandria⁹. The

¹ Marketou, et. al, "Egyptian Blue Pellets",1; Afifi, "Analytical Investigation of Pigments", 29.

² The black color was one of the most important pigments in ancient Egyptian. the crystalline carbon used as pigment material was graphite. Soot is famous for its fine crystals and their homogeneity; when mixed with the paint medium, these crystals appear in the form of chains or fibers. There are black pigments from mineral sources such as manganese oxides that were already identified as ancient pigments. See: Mahmoud, "Characterization of Pigments",2; Bourgeois & Jeammet, "La polychromie des terres cuites grecques",11.

³ The Egyptian artists used it also to express the night, death, and the other world, and therefore it was used a lot in funeral rites, as it expresses the idea of regeneration and fertility of the black soil of Egypt that renews its fertility after a flood every year.

Mahmoud, "Characterization of Pigments",2 ; Bourgeois & Jeammet, "La polychromie des terres cuites grecques",11; El-Mageed, E & Ibrahim, S., "Ancient Egyptian colours as a contemporary fashion", in: *Journal of the International Colour Association* 9, (2012), 35.

⁴ It was one of the colors used during the Hellenistic period and was usually iron based, in the form of goethite (iron oxide) or ocher. The greenish-green color was used before in many plaques paintings, such as it was used in a grave stele of a soldier on horseback 40 cm × 37 cm, Shabti necropolis, Alexandria, Greco-Roman Museum, inv. 10228, dating back to the Hellenistic period, Late 4 th–3 rd century BC, where the greenish-yellow color was used in the chiton worn by the soldier. It is worth to mention that the yellow color itself was used in Egypt from the fifth dynasty to the Roman period. See: Bourgeois & Jeammet, "La polychromie des terres cuites grecques", 11; Cole, S., "Ptolemaic Cavalrymen on Painted Alexandrian Funerary Monuments", in: *Arts* 8, 58, (2019), 8, fig. 5-6; Mahmoud, "Characterization of Pigments", 2 f.

⁵LSJ; Boardman, J., *The Oxford History of Classical Art*, London, (1993),127; Karoglou, Attic Pinakes, 2.

⁶ Richter, G., "Terracotta Plaques from Early Attic Tombs", in: *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 1, 1, 1942, fig. 2, 3.

⁷ Tripolitis, A., *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age*, U.S.A, (2002), 24

⁸ Goyette, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, 3

⁹ Kahil, "Cults in Hellenistic Alexandria", 73.

Ptolemaic dynasty followed in his footsteps in this claim¹ and Ptolemy IV Philopator mentioned that Dionysus's ivy plant was tattooed on his body².

The Ptolemaic celebrations, Πτολεμαῖα, are among the most important for the god Dionysus. They were initiated by Ptolemy II Philadelphus in late September 280 BC in commemoration of his parents Ptolemy I and Bernice³. It is a celebration of religious and mythical nature, derived from the conquests of Alexander the Great in Asia, as their glorification confirms the mythical relationship between them and Alexander the Great. Callixeinus states that this ceremony was costly, but there are indications that the state assumed these costs by imposing a special tax. This celebration was held in Alexandria every four years in the Greek way as the Ptolemies managed to organize it in the form of a series of separate marches. It is worth noting that the most prominent element in the celebration was the great procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus as he appeared leaning alongside his sister and wife Arsinoe II in the middle of a circle of guests. All were sitting on one hundred and thirty golden couches shaded with a royal wing near the stadium of Alexandria⁴. There was also the official banquet, which was divided into three processions: processions: one for the fathers of kings, another for all the deities and the last for stars⁵. The performances presented in the celebration included the scene of the return of the god Dionysus victorious from India⁶.

THE DATE

This style of depicting Dionysus and his followers, especially the facial features and hairstyle follows the pattern of Roman sarcophagi, due to the bad condition of the surface makes it impossible to use the central elements like eye drilling and hairstyles to suggest a date. But through the comparison of previous sarcophagi as well as our plaque we can date this plaque to the second century AD, perhaps the Antonine period for its Hellenistic modeling of the bodies and hairstyles.

CONCLUSION

This plaque is unique as it is considered the first terracotta plaque that depicts the triumph of Dionysus in India and came from Egypt specifically, Alexandria. The return of victorious Dionysus from India was depicted during the Hellenistic era because it served as a prototype for the victories of Alexander the Great and continued into the Roman era to symbolize the victorious ruler over his enemies, and to indicate the joy of victory among his followers. Moreover, this theme is of religious significance as it is related to the victory advocated by the Roman doctrine. The Roman sarcophagi from Egypt didn't show this theme, but it did depict Dionysus rescuing Ariadne. This plaque is an almost identical depiction of the scene executed on the Roman sarcophagi. It contains a rare scene depicting a sober Heracles in the scene of the return of Dionysus from India. We can say this plaque was attached to the wall of the temple, house or tomb. The cult of Dionysus spread in Egypt during the Hellenistic and Roman eras in Alexandria, and one of his

¹ Kahil, "Cults in Hellenistic Alexandria", 80; Tripolitis, A., *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age*, 24 ; Dunand, F., "Religious System at Alexandria", in: Ogden, D., (ed.) *A companion to Greek Religion*, V, 16, Oxford, (2007), 258

² Tripolitis, *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age*, 24.

³ Saunders, N., *Alexander's Tomb: The Two-Thousand Year Obsession to Find the Lost Conquerer*, Italy, (2006), 57 .

⁴ Dunand, "Religious System at Alexandria", 256

⁵ Kahil, "Cults in Hellenistic Alexandria", 80.

⁶ Kahil, "Cults in Hellenistic Alexandria", 80; Dunand, "Religious System at Alexandria", 257.

biggest celebrations was Ptolemaia, in which the scene of the return of Dionysus victorious from India was the most important element of the scene.

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FIGURES

Fig. 1



A) Face of terracotta plaque, 0.21 × 0.40 mm, from Alexandria, Cairo, Egyptian Museum, inv.

7	8
27	3



B) The back of the plaque



C) the same terracotta plaque

FIG. 2



A) Sardonyx Cameo, 4.2 x 2.7 cm, Alexandria, State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1st century BC.

<https://artblart.com/tag/cameo-triumph-of-dionysus/>

B) details in the motifs



FIG. 3: Cameo, from France, National Bibliotheque of France, Hellenistic Period, the end of 1st century BC. Babylon, Camees antiques, 46, no. 79, pl. IX.



FIG . 4: Bread stamp, Fouquet Collection, Ptolemaic Period. Perdrizet , les terres cuites grecques, p. 83 , pl. LXVII , no . 198



A



B

FIG. 5 (A, B) Reliefs of a marble sarcophagus, Naples, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 6776. It dates back to the end of the 1st century – the beginning of the 2nd century AD. Koch und Sichtermann, *Römische Sarkophage*, 192, fig. 226; LIMC, III, 2, Amor/Cupid, 336.



FIG. 6: A Marble sarcophagus, National Archaeological Museum, Naples. Inv. No. 6693
dates back to 160-170 AD.



FIG. 7: Roman Marble Sarcophagus in Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, Inv. GR. 1.1835. 150 AD. Matz, “ Die dionysischen Sarkophage ”, no. 129; LIMC, 469.



FIG. 8: Roman Sarcophagus, The Triumph of Bacchus, kept in Casino Rospigliosi, Rome, 150 AD. Matz, Die Dionysischen Sarkophage, Tafel 69.1; Meadows-Rogers, "Procession and Return", fig. 6.



FIG. 9: Mosaic from Acholla, baths of Trajan, frigidarium, 120-130 AD, Tunis Bardo Museum. Dunbabin, "Triumph of Dionysus", 53. [https://www.directbooking.ro/landmark-bardo-museum-281.aspx#photo\[obiectiv\]/1/](https://www.directbooking.ro/landmark-bardo-museum-281.aspx#photo[obiectiv]/1/)



A



B



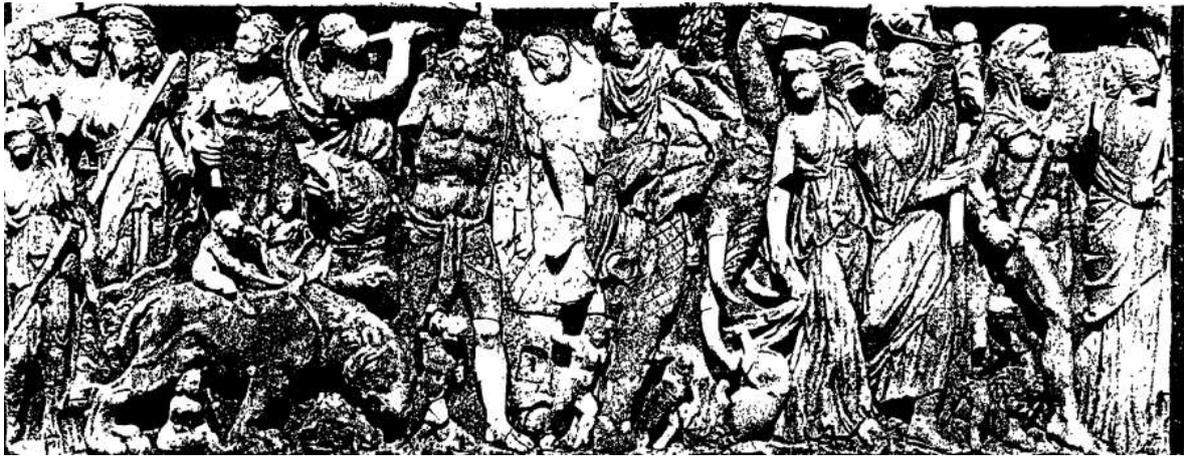
C

FIG. 10

A) details in reliefs.

B) Reliefs of Marble Sarcophagus from Lyon in France, dating back to 3rd century AD, Preserved in the Lyon Gallo-Roman Museum . Drunken Hercules in Triumph of Dionysus in India. Le Mer & Chomer, Carte archéologique, 664.

C) details in reliefs.



(A)



(B)

FIG. 11 (A, B) Relief, sarcophagus, Cliveden, Rome, Triumph of Dionysus in Indian, dating back to 210 AD. Ako-Adounvo, (Gifty), Studies in the Iconography of Blacks in Roman Art, PhD thesis, McMaster University, 1999, Cat. 41, Fig. 76;