



THE ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR, Tuesday March 14, 2023,

Gina Salapata, Massey University

Male Boiotian Bust-Protomes: From Technique to Religious Meaning

ABSTRACT

Archaic and Classical terracotta bust-protomes of female figures were frequently dedicated in sanctuaries or placed in tombs throughout the Greek world. Male protomes are rarer and come mainly from Boiotia. Dated from the late 5th through to the 4th c BC, they generally lack specific archaeological context but were very likely found in graves, most plundered during the late 19th century. The vast majority represent a bearded man, usually identified as Dionysos, based on attributes, such as an elaborate headdress, kantharos (or mug), and egg. Most of these protomes were adaptations of common female types by adding facial hair and modifying the attire—an expedient production method for coroplastic workshops.

A youthful clean-shaven type is represented by only two surviving protomes: one holding the standard egg and kantharos and the other holding an egg and a rooster. Formal similarities indicate that both were produced from a combination of female and male types, a procedure driven not only by technical necessity but possibly also by religious and ideological reasons: to convey the androgynous quality of either a young Dionysos or, more likely, that of a young initiate of Dionysos, whose identity was intentionally blurred with that of the god during the time of transition from adolescence to adulthood. Depositing a youthful protome (perhaps along with a bearded Dionysos type) in the grave of a prematurely deceased could have helped place him under the protection of the god of transitions who would guide him from life to death and hopefully to a blessed afterlife.

The seminar takes place **Tuesday March 14, 2023, 17.00 (Athens time)** with live presence at the Swedish Institute or via zoom link.

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