

What do the artistic representations of Antinous reveal about his reception in the Roman period?

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Abstract. There are more portrait depictions of Antinous, a country boy from Asia Minor, than of most Roman emperors. Does the relationship between Emperor Hadrian and Antinous explain the high number of representations, or can it be explained by Antinous' deification and flexibility as a hero and god? In this article I have examined a selection of artistic representations of Antinous from different locations around the Roman Empire and discussed why these representations were made, and what they meant for those viewing them. In doing so I show that Antinous was more than just a favourite of Hadrian: to the people who participated in his cult, he became a genuine focus of worship, who had the tangible powers and abilities of a deity.

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Introduction

Portrait depictions of Antinous were not reserved to one type or location; instead, these depictions have been found in a variety of settings across the Roman Empire and range from colossal statues and busts, to smaller portable items such as coins and cameos (Opper 2008, 186). Representations of Antinous survive in the largest numbers in marble sculpture and coinage - I will focus primarily on the sculptures as they are, in my opinion, the most representative of his reception and worship. The variety of representations of Antinous perhaps explains why there is such a vast quantity of depictions of him from the Roman world. Antinous is most commonly depicted with attributes or poses usually associated with deities, alluding to his deification and subsequent worship in the years following his death in A.D. 130.

It is impossible to discuss Antinous without also mentioning the Emperor Hadrian: it is through the beautiful and mysterious portraits of the former that their relationship is imagined, but this article instead hopes to consider how Antinous as an individual was presented and perceived by those across the Roman world. By discussing specific representations of Antinous, alongside architectural and epigraphic evidence, I will show that, in death, he was worshipped as a deity and celebrated as a hero without direct influence from Hadrian.

Literary Sources

Little is known about Antinous' life before he met Hadrian, and all sources date from after his death in A.D. 130. The literary sources agree on three facts about Antinous' life: first, he was from Bithynium in Bithynia, Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey); second, he had a relationship with Hadrian; and third, he drowned in the Nile (although the exact circumstances surrounding his death are not the subject of agreement). Cassius Dio, who was writing at the start of the third century A.D.,

some 80 years after Antinous' death, is perhaps the most accurate as he is a near contemporary source for a biography of his life (Vout 2007, 54). He states two reasons for Antinous' death in A.D. 130: accidentally falling into the Nile or, as he himself believed to be true, being offered for sacrifice by Hadrian and subsequently deliberately drowned in the Nile. (Cassius Dio. Roman History. 69.11).

From Pausanias, a second century A.D. writer, we are given an account of the beginnings of the worship of Antinous in Mantinea, Greece, as Hadrian established his honours there with a festival and mystic rites every year and games every four years, celebrations and honours which were intended to be regular and long-term events (Pausanias, Description of Greece, 8.9.8). Although he never saw Antinous alive, he knew him 'in statues and in pictures', indicating that images of Antinous could be found in a variety of settings across Greece (Pausanias, Description of Greece, 8.9.7). He states that the portraits of Antinous from Mantinea resemble Dionysius - an assimilation which is often found in his portraiture (Pausanias, Description of Greece, 8.9.8). Although there is very little known about Antinous' life, including his age and how he met Hadrian, the artistic depictions of him can reveal more information about how he was received by his contemporaries in the Roman period.

Context: Architectural evidence and epigraphic sources

As the literary sources on Antinous' life and death have been discussed, it is also relevant to briefly examine the epigraphic and architectural sources which are further illuminated by the sculptures and numismatic evidence. The founding of a city in the years following the death of Antinous, Antinoopolis, demonstrates the initial impetus by Hadrian for the subsequent deification and worship of Antinous. The city was founded on the east bank of the Nile close to the site where Antinous drowned, on the one hand facing the important Egyptian city of Hermopolis, and on the other facing the ruins of the ancient Egyptian city, Besa (Galimberti 2007, 106). Although little remains of Antinoopolis, there are a number of monuments and artefacts elsewhere that attest to the worship of Antinous in the city. One such monument is the Pincio obelisk in Rome, which in hieroglyphic script states the honours afforded to Antinous. It is thought to have originally stood in front of an *Antinoeion*, a temple to Antinous, at Hadrian's villa in Tivoli. The inscription describes, in detail, the original *Antinoeion* at Antinoopolis, of which nothing remains. According to it, the temple was built in high quality white marble, with numerous columns and with statues of a variety of gods (Opper 2008, 178). The inscription seems to suggest that the obelisk served as a funerary marker for Antinous' tomb, however no evidence for a tomb has been found at Antinoopolis or at Hadrian's Villa (Opper 2008, 177).

Other inscriptions illustrating the strength of the cult of Antinous have been found across the Roman world, and in a variety of settings and circumstances. The *Antinoeion* in Mantinea, the one mentioned by Pausanias, has one of the best examples of how the cult of Antinous evolved from the implication by Hadrian to the worship of Antinous as a divine being capable of divine acts. An evocative

inscription addressed to 'Antinous' is by a father asking that the god care for his son (Vout 2007, 64): it indicates that some residents of the city had a fervent belief in Antinous as a deity who was capable of divine protection. This fact demonstrates that in the years following his death Antinous had become more than simply the young and beautiful lover of the emperor, and instead, was regarded as a powerful individual in his own right. The connection between Mantinea and Antinous' birthplace, Bithynium, no doubt strengthened his cult in this city, but it is also clear that the cult was perpetuated by the residents of the city due to their genuine belief in Antinous as a god. In Antinous' home city of Bithynium a small limestone altar indicates that he was worshipped as a god: 'to the new god Antinous, Sosthenes (dedicated this) as a prayer' (Smith 2018, 53). The formula of the inscription indicates that Antinous had answered the prayer, confirming that, for Sosthenes, Antinous had tangible divine powers. At Lanuvium, some 20 miles south of Rome, a burial club based around the worship of Diana and Antinous is evidenced from an inscription (Beard, North and Price 1998, 272). Dated to June A.D. 136 and located on the wall of the *Antinoeion*, it sets out the rules for those in the burial association. Diana had a cult at nearby Nemi, whilst Antinous was a new god with associations with the underworld - an appropriate deity for a burial club.

The epigraphic and architectural evidence show the belief in and worship of Antinous as a divine being in a diversity of settings, from the city named after him in Egypt, to Hadrian's impressive villa in Tivoli, to the small altar in his home city. These examples present Antinous as a deity who was and could be celebrated and worshipped in a number of diverse circumstances by a wide range of people. The diversity of his worship and worshippers can be seen further in the artistic representations of Antinous that have been found in many forms across the Roman world.

Numismatics

Coins depicting Antinous allowed for his likeness, and thus associations of beauty and divinity, to be seen by a potentially large number of people as coins are very portable and numerous artefacts. Some thirty-three cities in the eastern Roman Empire (namely modern-day Greece and Turkey) minted coins depicting Antinous. Although this does not necessarily accurately reflect the popularity of the deified youth in the eastern provinces compared to those in the west. Coinage in the western provinces was minted and distributed from Rome whilst cities in the east minted their own coinage which allowed for a more varied and localised subject matter. (Smith 2018, 110). The coinage from Smyrna, Turkey is attributed to Marcus Antonius Polemon, an acquaintance of Hadrian and benefactor of the city. (Smith 2018, 110). Elsewhere the benefactors are also named on the coins which suggests that the depiction of Antinous was used to gain favour with the emperor rather than as a symbol of veneration or belief in him as a divinity (Jones 2010, 80). However, some of those named on the coins are described as "priests of Antinous" which could be a symbolic title but could also be a religious position with duties and rites to carry out (*Ibid*).

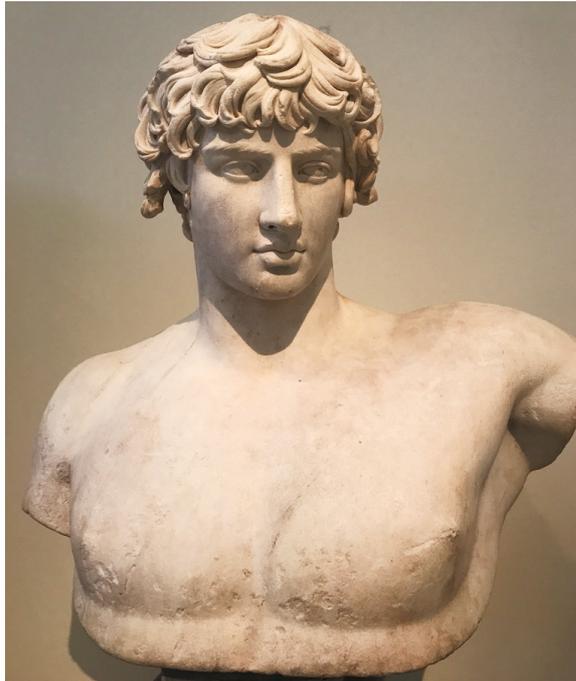


Figure 1: Bust of Antinous. National Archaeological Museum of Athens, Greece.

Sculpture

Sculptures of Antinous rely on a recognisable physiognomy and, in most portraits, hairstyle. The sweeping curled locks fall on his face whilst those at the back are longer brushing his neck and covering the ears. The curls are perfectly formed yet do not mimic deliberately styled hair (such as those seen on portraits of Hadrian) and instead reference the naturally beautiful hair of youthful heroes and deities (Smith 2018, 22). The standardised facial features suggest that the portraiture of Antinous was organised and modelled from an original portrait, perhaps authorised by Hadrian himself and modelled when Antinous was still alive. (Smith 2018, 28). Despite displaying the features of an idealised classical face, statues of Antinous also encompass portrait features which turns the idealised face into a more realistic or veristic depiction of an individual. This combination allows for depictions of Antinous to be almost immediately recognisable regardless of the pose or attributes that the sculpture may feature. The lack of secure findspots or contexts means that it is difficult to give statues of Antinous secure dates, although some can be dated with the use of sculptural techniques such as the drilling of eyes and other features which only began after the period of Hadrian (Smith 2018, 24). Whilst only a small number of sculptures have drilled pupils, they are significant as they provide evidence for the production of Antinous portraits after the death of Hadrian. The majority have been hesitantly dated for the period between the death of Antinous in A.D. 130 and the death of Hadrian in A.D. 138. Whilst this is a reasonable period for the sculptures to belong to, it will be suggested that it is likely that many of them belong to the period after Hadrian's death. The sculptures to be discussed will prove that the worship of Antinous existed without an explicit connection to Hadrian, and thus, artistic representations of the former would have

been created and venerated after his death. Of course, it is also likely that statues created in the period of A.D. 130-138 or in Antinous' lifetime continued to be used many years after his death.

The selection of pieces starts with a bust from Athens (Figure 1). It is a high-quality example of the typical Antinous physiognomy and hair (Meyer 1991, 29). Alongside the facial features, the downwards gaze is found in many statues of Antinous, perhaps most noticeably in the above bust type of which there are ten examples showing the nude full shoulder bust (Smith 2018, 28). The downward gaze gives the depictions of Antinous an impression of coquettishness, as if he is deliberately feigning the viewers' attention and admiration. Some full body statues also feature the downward gaze, in which his eyes meet those of the viewers creating an intimate connection between the audience and Antinous. A statue of this kind was found at Delphi, Greece in which Antinous had the attributes of Apollo - a wreath worn on the head as seen from the holes which would have supported it. (Meyer 1991, 37).



Figure 2: Bust of Antinous. Württemberg State Museum, Stuttgart, Germany.

One small bust in the Württemberg State Museum, Stuttgart, Germany shows that Antinous could be a highly personal deity who was worshipped in private, intimate settings (Figure 2). This small bust is believed to be from Egypt, specifically Antinoopolis, based on the materials used, specifically the alabaster of the bust and the green-stone acanthus leaf support. (Meyer 1991, 78). The bust comprises four individual parts including the bust itself and the three parts making the stand. The size, only 29 cm in height, and dismantlable nature of the bust suggests it was designed to be easily carried and transported, allowing for Antinous to be worshipped anywhere (Smith 2018, 54). It closely follows the nude bust type of

Antinous portrait and displays how one specific portrait type could be used for different purposes and needs.



Figure 3: Inscribed bust of Antinous. Syria. Private Collection.

A third bust (Figure 3), thought to be from the town of Balanea on the Syrian coast (modern-day Baniyas), is an important example of a representation of Antinous as it combines his standard depiction as a classical beautiful youth with an inscription confirming his status as a hero and an object of worship. The nude bust draws attention to the face and head, whilst the inscription on the stand is easily read by those viewing the statue. The foot of the bust is inscribed in Greek: '*to (the) hero Antinous, Marcus Luceius Flaccus (dedicated this)*'. The two lines of text differ in the size of letters and spacing, respectively, meaning that they were carved at different times by different people. The first line, '*to (the) hero Antinous*', was likely carved at the marble workshop before it was shipped to Syria (Smith 2018, 21), while the second one, '*Marcus Luceius Flaccus (dedicated this)*', could date back to the time it arrived in Balanea and was in the ownership of Flaccus (*Ibid*). The presence of the second line suggests that this bust was not for a private, domestic cult but rather for a public cult space where the dedication by Flaccus could be seen by the community. The combination of a recognisable portrait type and an inscription naming Antinous as a hero is significant, as it provides a secure example of Antinous' worship and veneration. The Syrian findspot of the bust is also important, as it demonstrates that the worship of Antinous had spread beyond the initial cult spaces, those based on

sculptural remains, which focussed on Hadrian's Villa and the surrounding Italian area.



Figure 4: Antinous-Osiris. Hadrian's Villa, Tivoli, Italy. (Vatican Museums, Vatican City).

Of the sculptures of Antinous that have been found, the number associated with private or domestic settings is more than double those found in public locations, with the majority of the former category being found at Hadrian's villa in Tivoli (Vout 2007, 92). The depictions of Antinous from Hadrian's private residence confirm that Hadrian himself had input in how Antinous was depicted in artistic representations, thus having direct influence on how Antinous was received in his afterlife as an object of worship and desire. Although the sculptures of Antinous found at Hadrian's Villa are no doubt explicitly connected to and likely commissioned by Hadrian himself, they illustrate that during his lifetime, and even perhaps during the lifetime of Antinous, he was portrayed in the guise of different deities which is significant to the reception of these images in the years following Hadrian's death and the later Roman period.

The volume of statues and the possible presence of an *Antinoeion* indicates that Hadrian privately participated in the cult of Antinous, too (Smith 2018, 86). From Tivoli comes the statue of Antinous-Osiris which is also believed to be from the aforementioned *Antinoeion* (Figure 4). The association of Antinous and Egypt is significant as it not only connects him to his place of death and conflation with Osiris, but it also adds a layer of mystique and exoticism. The pose is reminiscent of Egyptian statuary whilst the realistic body and face follow that of classical statues (*Ibid*). The identification of this as Antinous does not rely on his signature hair which

is covered by the *nemes* (headdress), but rather on the physiognomy which is near identical to the standard Antinous portrait face (*Ibid*).



Figure 5: Mondragone Antinous. (Louvre, France).

Many artistic representations of Antinous incorporate attributes of deities such as Apollo and Dionysius. The choice of gods relates to the youthful, beautiful, countryside aspects of Antinous' character and reception. The Mondragone Antinous (Figure 5) is a colossal head which was once part of a cult statue (Smith 2018, 60). It is thought to have been part of an acrolithic statue - one in which composite parts are made of different materials including marble, wood and ivory. The holes visible in the hair of the statue originally supported a metal headdress and the eyes would have been metal or gemstones, and combined with the scale, the statue would have been an impressive and potent symbol of divine power (Smith 2018, 60). It was discovered as part of the Borghese collection at Villa Mondragone in Italy (from which the statue takes its name), and thus, the original location of the cult statue and subsequent cult space are lost. The hair with a central parting and elaborate style is reminiscent of classical depictions of Apollo (Smith 2018, 60). The face is inherently classical with the smooth skin and perfect features;

yet it is also instantly recognisable as Antinous (Meyer 1991, 114). The Braschi Antinous is another colossal cult statue of Antinous in which he is shown with the attributes of Dionysius - a wreath of leaves and berries. (Smith 2018, 60). Both the Mondragone and the Braschi Antinous are examples of large cult statues which would have stood in their own dedicated cult space.

Conclusion

It is clear from the selection of depictions of Antinous from across the Roman Empire that he became more than just the lover of Hadrian and, in death, to the people who participated in his cult, he became a genuine object of worship, who had the tangible powers and abilities of a deity. Through assimilation with familiar deities such as Apollo and Dionysius he was given immediate recognition within the guise of the Roman pantheon. The choice of representing Antinous as hero or god, and the choice of which mythological figure or deity with which to assimilate him, was dependent on the context and needs of the community or individual who used the representation of Antinous as a sacred object. By assimilating Antinous with classical, youthful deities, he is portrayed as an idealised and beautiful youth whose death facilitated his deification and worship. Whilst the impetus by Hadrian to deify Antinous after the latter's death may have started the worship of Antinous as a hero or god, this cult was clearly adopted by individuals and groups across the Roman Empire independent of efforts by the Emperor. Thus, although Antinous' reception in the Roman period was framed by his relationship with Hadrian and untimely death, he was quickly received as a deity and hero by those who participated in his cult - a cult that does not seem to be reserved to one part of the Empire, nor to a specific group of people. His worship and reception were as varied as the artistic representations of him, of which I have discussed but a selection. However, as the majority of artistic representations of Antinous that survive are marble sculptures, which are associated with the elite and wealthy, it is difficult to know if and in what ways those of a lower status participated in his cult. The large number of depictions of Antinous has in turn led to his popularity in the modern age - although the reception in the modern period is more closely tied to his relationship with Hadrian (Burns 2008, 121). Whilst we do not know much about Antinous' life or death, it is clear from the variety of artistic representations that his reception in the Roman world was widespread and for a number of reasons. From those commissioning statues to gain favour with the emperor Hadrian, to those worshipping Antinous as a *bona fide* deity, to those who may have done both.

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Figure credits

Figure 1: Bust of Antinous. National Archaeological Museum of Athens, Greece. Photograph authors own.

Figure 2: Bust of Antinous. Württemberg State Museum, Stuttgart, Germany. Photo from Smith 2018, 55. Figure 25a. Stuttgart, Württembergisches Landesmuseum, inv. Arch 74/3.

Figure 3: Inscribed bust of Antinous. Syria. Private Collection. Photograph authors own taken during “Antinous: boy made god” exhibition at Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Figure 4: Antinous-Osiris. Villa Adriana, Tivoli. Vatican Museums, Vatican City. Accessed via <http://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/museo-gregoriano-egizio/sala-iii--ricostruzione-del-serapeo-del-canopo-di-villa-adriana/statua-di-osiri-antino.html#&gid=1&pid=1>

Figure 5: Mondragone Antinous. Louvre Museum, Paris, France. Accessed via https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antinous_Mondragone_Louvre_Ma1205_n5.jpg

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