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Roman Giallo Antico Marble Head of Dionysos



An ancient Roman giallo antico marble herm head of Dionysos (Bacchus) in archaistic style with wavy locks of hair held beneath a diadem, and bifurcated beard.

Ca. 2nd century AD.
Height: 6 1/4 in. (16 cm).

Giallo antico, a yellow marble with red veins, was one of the first colored marbles to be imported into ancient Rome. Its principal quarry was located at Chemtou in Tunisia, ancient Numidia, hence its Latin name marmor numidicum. By the Augustan period, it had become synonymous with luxury and wealth, frequently appearing in public monuments and private residences throughout the empire. It was very often used in herms - rustic statues representing Hermes or Dionysos. Dionysos (Latin: Bacchus or Liber) was the god of wine. Consequently he was seen as the personification of the life force of the vine and vegetation and the earth's fertiltiy. He was a volatile god whose rites were celebrated in an ecstatic and orgiastic fashion. His female devotees were the Maenads (Bacchantes) and their drunken and lascivious male counterparts were the Satyrs (Fauns). Drunken old Silenos was also a member of his retinue. No where in ancient literature is the passion and fury of Dionysos better articulated than in Euripides tragedy, "The Bacchantes," (ca. 406 BC). Where Dionysos and the women of Thebes exact a terrible revenge on young prince Pentheus for his failure to pay homage to the god.

Formerly in an Ohio private collection.

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