

An Artifact Speaks • Artifact Information Sheet

Artifact Name: Zeus of Artemision (miniature)

Time Period/Date of the Original: 460-450 BCE

Culture/Religion Group: Ancient Greek

Material of the Original: Bronze

Reproduction? Yes



Background Information:

The original statue was found in two parts in a shipwreck off of Cape Artemision in northern Euboea, the second largest Greek island. It stands almost 7 feet tall and dates from the Early Classical period of Greek art, also known as the time of the “Severe Style.” During this period, casting sculptures in bronze, instead of carving them in marble, became the standard. The most common style of male statue was the standing nude. Sometimes referred to as “heroic nudity,” these statues are the embodiment of the Greek belief in the beauty and sacredness of the nude male form and were used to praise not only the gods but warriors and athletes. The statue combines the motion and action of the body with the calmness and surety of the mind.

The statue is thought to represent either the god Zeus about to throw his thunderbolt or the god Poseidon about to throw his trident. Some scholars lean towards Zeus, as the god is in the same position as other representations of Zeus from that time period. Poseidon is shown with his trident down lower on his body in artworks, so the weapon doesn’t obscure his face. There would have been no confusion when the statue was first created, as the proper weapon would have been added to the god’s hand. It is also believed that his lips and eyebrows would have been fitted with metals and his eyes fitted with precious stones, as was done on the famous Charioteer of Delphi. Also a topic of discussion is the the god’s arms, which are unusually long. Some scholars see this as a show of Zeus’s power, some see it as a way to perfectly balance the span of the god’s arms with his height, and others see it as a mistake on the part of the sculptor.

Sources:

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