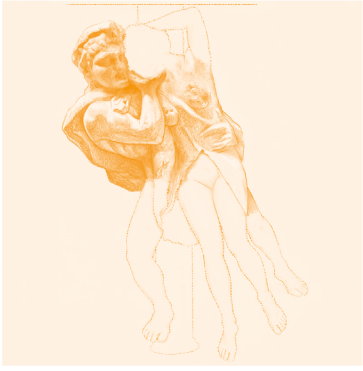
A Dionysiac *monopodium* from the Royal Quarter of Alexandria and its original type



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Abstract: Figural table supports (*monopodia*) are a distinctive class of Graeco-Roman domestic furniture, but few examples are securely documented from Egypt. This study re-examines a fragmentary Dionysiac marble group from the Royal Quarter (*Basileia*) of Alexandria, now in the Graeco-Roman Museum (GRM inv. 3577), which depicts a youthful Satyr clasping a Maenad. Since its first mention by Giuseppe Botti and subsequent descriptions by Achille Adriani and Paul Stanwick, the piece has been treated as a small free-standing sculpture, and its function has never been questioned. Through examination of the tapering rear support, together with typological comparison with the Dionysiac support type and related Hellenistic sculpture, the article argues that the object is a table support (*monopodium*). The group has no exact typological parallel, which suggests that a lost Alexandrian original was later reproduced. Its recovery from the *Basileia*, among richly decorated architectural remains, points to a high-status setting in which sculptural furniture formed part of elite display. The piece thus illuminates Dionysiac iconography in the domestic décor of Graeco-Roman Egypt under Roman rule.

Keywords: *monopodium*, table support, Alexandria, *Basileia*, Satyr and Maenad, Dionysiac iconography, Hellenistic sculpture

Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 35.1 | Osama et al. 2026: 247–268
https://doi.org/10.37343/uw.2083-537X.pam35.1.08
received 16 June 2026 | received in revised form 22 July 2026 | accepted 22 July 2026 | available online 31 October 2026
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INTRODUCTION

Dionysiac subjects were among the most popular themes in the domestic art of the Graeco-Roman world, and they appear not only in wall paintings and mosaics but also in carved furniture such as figural table supports. In Alexandria, many such sculptures entered museum collections soon after their discovery and were given identifications that have rarely been tested against the physical evidence of the objects themselves or their archaeological contexts. Among the sculptural finds attributed to the Palaces area is a small marble group, preserved today in the Graeco-Roman Museum (GRM inv. 3577), depicting a Satyr clasping a Maenad [see below, *Figs 1–4*]. The piece was first mentioned by Giuseppe Botti, who regarded it as a complete miniature statuette, "*un jeune faune embrassant avec ardeur une nymphe*", and interpreted it as a small votive object (Botti 1898: 60, Cat. No. 9).

This identification was retained in later literature on the object, in which Achille Adriani (1961/II: 29–30, Cat. 114, Pl. 63, Fig. 199) and Paul Stanwick (2025: 41, Scu 12) regarded it as a free-standing sculpture. The present study re-examines inv. 3577 through three central questions:

1. The function of the piece: the presence of a support column on the back side likely indicates that the object was a *monopodium*, which, if correct, would constitute a new functional identification of the object.
2. The typology of the sculpture: no typical parallel or replica series has been identified to date — a point not addressed in previous litera-



Fig. 1. The Satyr–Maenad group, GRM inv. 3577, front view (Photo A. Osama; courtesy of the Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria)

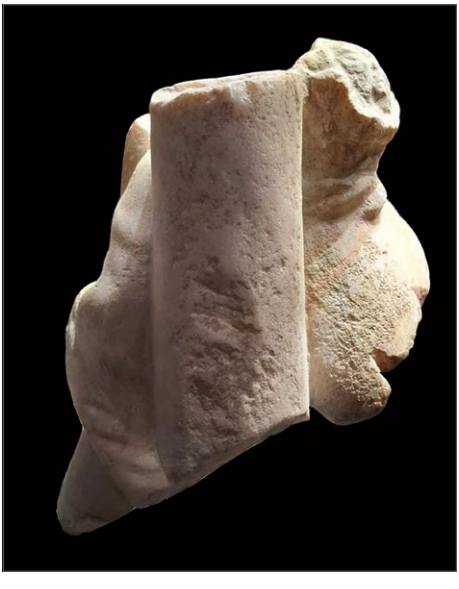

Fig. 2. The Satyr–Maenad group, GRM inv. 3577, rear view showing the tapering pillar support (Photo A. Osama; courtesy of the Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria)

ture. Consequently, the possibility of an Alexandrian type, as well as the question of its originality, must be considered. A possible reconstruction of the group will be presented.

3. The archaeological context: the piece was found inside the Royal Quarter of Alexandria, together with other architectural, sculptural, and everyday objects. This article therefore outlines its original architectural context, considering the chronological changes or continuity of this location within the *Basileia*.

DESCRIPTION

The group is carved from a single block of fine-grained marble and preserves the entwined upper bodies of a Satyr and a Maenad, together with the remains of a tall, tapering rear strut [*Figs 1–2*]. The stone was identified as white marble (Adriani 1961/II: 28–29). The figures are locked in a compact embrace, with the Satyr positioned behind and slightly to the right of the Maenad's body. Although the legs are largely lost, the muscular treatment of the Satyr's body suggests that his weight rested on the right leg.



Fig. 3. The Satyr–Maenad group, GRM inv. 3577, side view (Photo A. Osama; courtesy of the Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria)

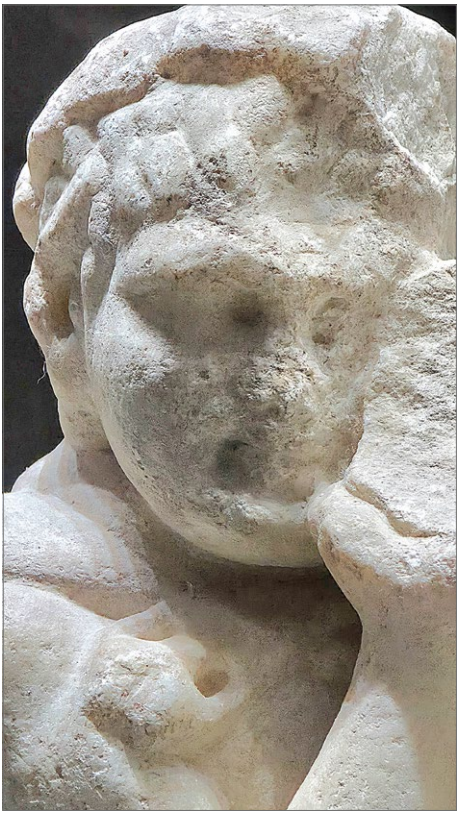

Fig. 4. The Satyr–Maenad group, GRM inv. 3577, detail of the Satyr's head (Photo A. Osama; courtesy of the Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria)

The Satyr is dressed in a *nebris*, flaring behind him. Its lower edge is twisted, and a similar, lighter twist is visible around the neck, with two light folds on the right shoulder. One foreleg of the animal skin, likely a panther, is visible on his right forearm. The arrangement of the garment indicates the Satyr's backward-leaning posture and his forceful grasp of the Maenad's body [*Figs 1–4*]. The Satyr's left hand, with slender, slightly elongated fingers, presses firmly against the Maenad's waist at the left hip.

The head is framed by thick, compact curls beneath a floral wreath, probably of pine, and the facial features are broadly but clearly modeled: the brow ridge is prominent, the nose is straight and pronounced, and the mouth is small with closed lips. The eyes lack inner details. The ear is set high and terminates in an animal-like pointed tip, a common feature in Satyr iconography [see *Fig. 4*].

The Maenad wears a *nebris* [see *Fig. 1*], with a foreleg of the animal skin visible on the front, while the other is not traceable. Her slender, softly modeled body was supported by the Satyr. Apparently, she was intoxicated, and her left arm was raised above her head. The surface of the Maenad's body beneath the abdomen shows a rough area with an overall inverted-V shape, indicating that this part of the figure was completed in plaster.

The angle of the dress edge on the right side and the extended arm most likely indicate that the right hand was holding the edge of the *nebris*. It is difficult to reconstruct the nature and details of the plaster completion; however, it may have exposed her genitals.

The backside of the group is dominated by a tall, tapering rear support carved from the same block of marble [see *Fig. 2*]. The support rises above the bodies, and the folds of the garment are rendered with a relatively summary treatment.

SUBJECT

The group represents a Dionysiac theme —a Satyr and a Maenad— carved in an embracing posture, with the Satyr holding her waist as he secures his grasp. At the same time, she rests her head on his shoulder, indicating her ecstatic and emotional state. Both appear to have just participated in a wild festival of wine and dance, as suggested by their panther skins. The Satyr's action reinforces the erotic character of the scene and his sexual intention, particularly in his use of his right hand to hold her chin. In Greek art, touching the chin is a traditional sign of flirting and sexual persuasion (Tanabe 2010: 81).

The tender, relaxed, and yielding body of the Maenad may further suggest her ecstatic state, while her relaxed right arm, which pulls aside the edge of the dress, indicates her erotic response. Whatever the precise form of this exposed area, a similarly dressed Maenad in Venice shows the reversed V-shaped *nebris* opened to expose the genitals (Traversari 1986: 141, No. 47). This reconstruction of the Maenad's movement is consistent with the erotic significance of the group. The exposed body of the Maenad conveyed to the banqueting viewer the Dionysiac sacred sphere of wine, food, dance, and sexuality.

The subject of a Satyr chasing or seducing a Maenad is common in classical art across various narratives (McNally 1978: 126–127). As the decoration of a table leg, this subject would be well suited to a banqueting room or *triclinium*, where *symposia* were held, occasions associated with drinking, erotic foreplay, and sexual intercourse (Bragantini 2018: 137–138, 140–141).

It appears to represent a particularly intense moment of divine passion, captured from the wild and brought into the domestic space for the enjoyment of the symposiasts, and perhaps for sharing in the wild actions of the sacred retinue that venerate Dionysus. The moment of the Maenad's stimulation is less frequently depicted in the visual arts, but a 5th-century BC Attic vase shows a comparable moment, with a similar posture and attributes, particularly the panther skin (Kossatz-Deissmann 1994: 91, No. 104). More significantly, as far as can be established, this Alexandrian sculpture has no close typological parallel or replica series, which underscores the importance of a detailed typological analysis of the object.

TYPE

The two figures of this statuary group lack their lower legs. The Satyr was likely supported by his right leg, as indicated by the muscularity of the right hip, with the extended left leg positioned behind the Maenad's body. Such a pose is consistent with the prominent rendering of the ribs on the Satyr's chest, with both features indicating a movement requiring physical effort, further illustrated by his left hand holding the Maenad's body.

The Maenad's yielding body is softly carved, as is common in this genre of figures representing an ecstatic state. Her left arm was likely raised above her head (as proposed by Adriani 1961/II: 28–29, Cat. 111, Pl. 61, Fig. 195) and perhaps touched the Satyr's hair; this posture is attested in some erotic scenes, especially in Roman paintings (Bragantini 2018: 137–138, Figs 5–6). The composition of this group therefore seems to draw on different iconographic types belonging to the worlds of Dionysus and Eros/Psyche, as well as on Hellenistic Rococo and Baroque compositions and certain genre figures.

In terms of structure, the Dionysiac statuary group type provides a conceptual typological framework. The unknown sculptor shifted the figure to the left, retaining the drunken posture and raised arm (for the Drunken Dionysus figure with the arm raised above the head, see Schröder 1989), while substituting the Maenad for the Dionysus figure. Her falling head, resting on the Satyr's shoulder, is more inclined than that of Dionysus and could be related to the Baker Dancer (Adriani 1972: 156–157, Pl. XXXV.1). Her right hand, holding the edge of the *nebris*, likewise appears to derive from the same motif in that statuette.

The Satyr of this same group, whose body usually displays dramatic torsion or a pronounced twist beneath the body of Dionysus, is shifted to the right in the Alexandrian group. The Satyr appears in three-quarter view, with a bent right knee and an extended left leg, em-

phasizing the frontality of the Maenad figure, while both figures remain visible together.

Furthermore, the sculptor selected a specific variation of the Dionysiac support type in which the Satyr, or the sup-

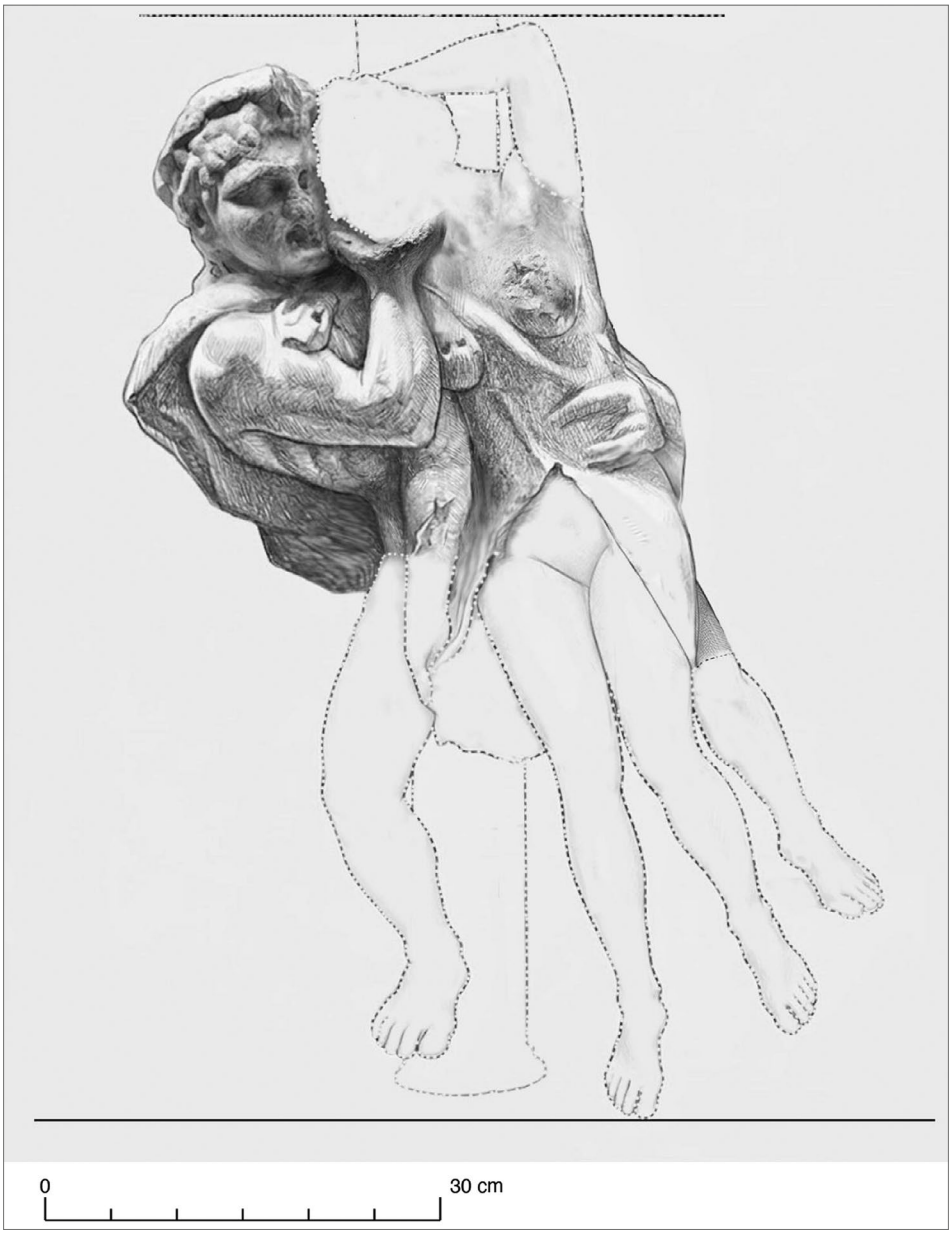

Fig. 5. Graphic reconstruction of the Satyr–Maenad group, GRM inv. 3577: preserved parts shown photographically; restored parts shown as a dotted outline (Photo, drawing, and digital reconstruction A. Osama)

porting figure, appears partially behind the body of Dionysus, which is earlier in date within this statuary group classification (Schröder 1989).[1]

This posture in the Alexandrian statuary group —the Satyr's dramatically twisted body, together with his extended left leg positioned behind the Maenad's leaning body— adds volume to the composition and reinforces its triangular structure.

Although this extended leg can be traced in many Hellenistic originals, such as the Pasquino Group (Pollitt 1986: 117, Fig. 119; Stewart 1990: Figs 745–747; Smith 1991: 117, Figs 133.1–3; Ridgway 2000: 284–285), the Boy and the Goose (Pollitt 1986: 128, Fig. 132; Ridgway 1990: 232–233, Pl. 114; 2000: 251–252; Smith 1991: 152, Fig. 170), and the Odysseus from Antikythera (Ridgway 2002: 69–76), it is also attested among Roman reproductions of the Dionysiac support type, which are designated as Group N in Schröder's catalog (Schröder 1989: 147–157, Pls XV–XVIII). Interestingly, some examples of this group are identified as *monopodia*.

The intimate gesture of the two figures in the Alexandrian group could be related to many figures with an erotic charge; however, the closest parallel is the group of Eros and Psyche kissing, particularly in terms of its corporeal embrace and the gesture of the hand touching the chin (Icard-Gianolio 1994: 455, Nos 121, 126; 458, No. 141c).

Many examples depict an arm of Eros, and sometimes of Psyche, across the chest, together with a chin-chuck gesture toward the partner (Icard-Gianolio 1994: 455, No. 121a). The eclectic taste of the sculptor included the same chin-chuck gesture, which has been known since the Archaic period (Dover 1978: 94–95)[2] and is attested in other Hellenistic media (Tanabe 2010: 83–84, Fig. 4). The treatment in the Alexandrian group is not identical; rather, the hand cups the entire face of the Maenad, but it still derives conceptually from the Eros–Psyche group.

The sculptor added to his new composition the gesture of the Maenad's right hand, which has no typical parallel in representations of this subject. She holds the edge of the *nebris* and pulls it outward, presumably to expose her lower body.

The motif may also have been inspired by the left hand of the Baker Dancer, given that it is a close mirror figure. The movement and gesture may have been influenced by the concept of Isis-Aphrodite *Anasyromene*[3] (Nifosì 2019: 93–95). The dress of the Graeco-Egyptian goddess is drawn up to expose her genitals, convey-

1 This early example is a bronze statuette finial (Nadelknauf) from the Galjub hoard, now in the Pelizaeus-Museum, Hildesheim (inv. 2265), dated 170–150 BC; see Schröder 1989: 161, Cat. P 1, Pl. XX.

2 The earliest attested instance of this "up and down" configuration, dated to the 7th century BC, is in fact heterosexual: a fully clothed woman grasps the youth's wrists to push his hands away (Dover 1978: 94).

3 The Isis-Aphrodite *Anasyromene* is a type of Graeco-Egyptian terracotta figurine that became popular from the Ptolemaic period onwards. It shows the goddess —who combines Isis, Hathor, and Aphrodite— lifting her dress with both hands to reveal her pubic area. The gesture is both erotic and rooted in earlier Egyptian rituals linked to the cults of Bastet, Apis, and Hathor; the form of the drapery is also discussed by Nifosì (2019: 93–95, Fig. 3.11).

ing the same erotic message as this group. This gesture, rooted in Egyptian rituals associated with Hathor, Bastet, and Apis, as described by Herodotus and Diodorus, emphasizes not only fertility but also sexual attraction (Vassilieva and Malykh 2021: 624, 630). This posture indicates an erotic character consistent with the post-*thiasos* mode of the Dionysiac retinue.

The proposed reconstruction of the entire group [*Fig. 5*] shows an apparent pyramidal structure, which connects the statuary group to major Hellenistic creations of the late 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. As an example, the statuary group of the Boy and the Goose offers a particularly instructive parallel: typically, the boy holds the bird and pulls it forcefully toward him, while his right arm, holding the goose's neck, stretches across his chest, in a pattern very similar to that of the new Alexandrian group. The boy's twisted waist and bent right leg are other features shared by the two groups. The statue has been connected to Herodas's Fourth Mimiamb (Mimiamb 4.31); some of these poems could have been written in Alexandria (Fraser 1972/I: 315, 324). In this regard, Pliny attributes a bronze group of this subject to Boethos of Chalkedon (Pliny, *NH* 34.84; cf. Ridgway 2006: 644).

The corporeal pose of the Satyr finds a good parallel in the Menelaus/Odysseus figure in the Pasquino group: the footwork is very similar, and the twisted torso and the movement to the left side are remarkable features. The Odysseus from Antikythera presents a similar leg position and a comparable right arm pose. The Satyr's body finds a close typological parallel among Alexandrian sculptures, including a mirror figure in the Marching Farmer type, with its strong movement and bent legs (Ashour 2007: 745–748, Cat. 319, 320).

The Maenad's body could be compared to the exotic Siren from the Memphite Sarapeion (Bergmann 2007: 248) and to another Memphite plaster cast of a Maenad carrying a shield, as well as to the Baker Dancer (Naerebout 2002: 62–63, Figs 1–2). The body type could be traced to type 25 among the so-called Kallimachian Maenads (Touchette 1995: 121, Pl. 1), with its similarly yielding, ecstatic expression and an arm raised above the head.

A further parallel for the Maenad is a fragmentary statuette in the Vatican (Vorster 2012–2013: 416–417, Fig. 16). Here, the Satyr originally stood at her right side, with his left hand placed on her breast. The body of the Vatican Maenad appears as a mirror image of the Alexandrian figure, which suggests some typological affinities. Although the body of the Satyr is missing, his pose must have involved a strong movement toward the right, corresponding to the Maenad's movement toward the left. This proposed interpretation of the Vatican piece may indicate that both depended on a common type. Vorster assigns the Vatican group to small-format sculpture produced in Rome in the late 4th century AD, a context that shows that Satyr-and-Maenad groups continued to be reproduced well into the early Byzantine period.

In its current condition, this group shows poorly proportioned execution of the Satyr's right arm, and his right hand beneath the Maenad's chin is roughly finished and poorly detailed, which

contrasts with the sophisticated iconographic vocabulary of the sculpture. The execution of the Maenad left shoulder is linear and lacks naturalness and depth, so that it appears as a straight line in side view. Its carving was likely affected by the nature of the mass of stone used for this group, which may have prompted the sculptor to use plaster for the surface of the Maenad's abdomen. This contrast between an inventive composition and a weak execution suggests that the present group is a later reproduction of a lost original sculpture of high quality.



Fig. 6. Coptic tapestry fragment with a Maenad and Satyr in an embrace, 4th century AD. Cleveland Museum of Art (inv. 1975.6) (Image courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art, CC0/ public domain)

This lost original, with its unique and unparalleled composition, was perhaps a creation of the late 3rd or early 2nd century BC. The pyramidal form is most closely associated with Rhodes (Pollitt 1986: 117–125). The original Alexandrian statue was likely carved by an itinerant Rhodian sculptor or by an Alexandrian workshop with Rhodian affinities, based on its triangular structure. A signature of the Rhodian sculptor Demetrios, found on a marble statue base in Alexandria,[4] dated between 180 and 148 BC, may support this connection (Ghisellini 2021: 53). The reign of Ptolemy IV could provide a fitting historical context, not only because of this ruler's Dionysiac devotion but also because of the typological comparison of the Maenad figure to the Baker Dancer and the Siren from the Memphite Dromos.

The Alexandrian character of this lost type may be further supported by a piece of Coptic textile depicting a closely comparable Maenad and Satyr in post-*thiasos* mode: a 4th-century AD tapestry fragment in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Arensberg 1977: 6, Fig. 2). The fragment [*Fig. 6*] belongs to a larger wall hanging with other Dionysiac figures (Willers 2007: 1–3).[5] The weaver modeled both bodies with remarkable painterly sophistication, using graded flesh tones; the Satyr's body gesture is comparable, while the Maenad may be

4 https://cpi.csad.ox.ac.uk/CPI-I/CPI-075.html.

5 Two further fragments are recognized: a Dionysus holding a cornucopia with a panther at his feet in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and a Maenad playing a kithara in the Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg; all three share an identical architectural framing and weaving technique, and the hanging has been called the "Behang Riggisberg-Boston-Cleveland" (Willers 2007: 10).

a mirror figure. Further Coptic evidence comes from a pilaster capital decorated in high relief with a Dionysiac scene of the Satyr carrying Herakles (Gabra and Eaton-Krauss 2007: 28–29, No. 18). Despite the frontal treatment, the Satyr displays a characteristic movement of the right leg. The Dionysus figure leans to the left and has the right arm raised above the head, which still connects the subject to the Drunk Dionysus statuary group. This parallel shows that the subject, with its distinctive gestures, was still being reproduced in Egyptian workshops centuries later — a continuity most easily explained if the composition formed part of local artistic repertoires.

The subject most plausibly depended on a work of Hellenistic date transmitted through Alexandrian workshop traditions. The eclectic combination of types documented above —the Baker Dancer, the Memphite Siren, and the Marching Farmer— is most economically explained by a model current in Alexandria, whether a sculpture, a bronze group, or even a painting, although the medium and the fame of that model cannot be determined from the surviving reproduction alone. Particularly noteworthy are the extended right leg and bent knee of the Satyr, as well as the intimate mode of the group, despite the different poses of the two figures.

STYLE AND DATE

The stylistic characteristics of this Alexandrian statuary group are noteworthy. First of all, the poses of both figures have no exact parallel among the numerous representations of Satyrs and Maenads from Classical Antiquity. The diagonal position of the Maenad is comparable to that of a Maenad figure on the Townley Vase in London (British Museum 2500), of early Imperial date but based on a Hellenistic model (Touchette 1995: 117, No. 46, Pl. 30c). The same pose appears on the Ptolemais base. Nevertheless, it is rarely attested in Graeco-Roman statuary groups of Satyrs and Maenads, and scholars disagree on whether it should be attributed to the 5th century BC or to the new Attic styles (on this debate, see Touchette 1995). However, the stylistic differences from the "Maenad types", particularly in the treatment of the flaring dresses and movements, distinguish the Alexandrian piece as a distinctive artistic production of a different sphere. The motif could be traced back to the Pothos statue by Skopas in the Skopasian Pothos type (Ridgway 1997: 253–254). This diagonal placement of the drunken figure in a Dionysiac group is attested on two *monopodia* from Attic workshops (Stefanidou-Tiveriou 1993: 254–255, Nos 64–65, Pl. 32), dated to Imperial times, demonstrating the popularity of the style in such subjects.

The Satyr's body reflects the Pergamene style of the Great Altar (Smith 1991: 174, Fig. 196.1), with deep folds of the *nebris* and the dramatic hollowing of the panther claw emphasizing the narrative character of the divine subject. The face is soft and more humanized, closely comparable to a statue of a Satyr in the Cairo Museum of Hellenistic date (Queyrel 1998: Cat. No. 215). The

right arm in both figures is bent and extends across the body. The hairstyle could be compared to the Resting Satyr (*Anapauomenos*) attributed to Praxiteles —here represented by the head of the Borghese copy (Galleria Borghese, No. 232)— in terms of the swept-up central hair locks, the three falling locks on the right side, and the elongated wavy hairlock above the animal's ear (Corso 2010: 56, Fig. 46). Despite the rough execution and the lack of any delineation of the individual locks, it nevertheless follows the same pattern.

Another remarkable stylistic feature of the Alexandrian group is the apparent contrast between the two bodies. The Satyr is carved with strong anatomical definition of the arm and waist, whereas the Maenad is rendered with a soft, sfumato-like body surface and smoother lines. Her yielding pose and falling body recall the recumbent female companion on the Alexandrian "Visit of Dionysos" relief (the so-called Maffei relief; Moreno 1999: 87–92, Figs 108–111), since both figures express the surrender of female softness to the wild and uncontrolled power of the *thiasos*. This delicate carving of her body and the wet-drapery treatment of the dress could be compared to middle Hellenistic models, which seem to continue on a candelabrum housed in Saint Petersburg (Touchette 1995: 70–71, No. 9, Pl. 12b–d), dated by Kieseritzky to the 1st century AD (Touchette 1995: 71), and to a Maenad statue in Venice (the so-called Baccante from the Grimani collection) (Valentinelli 1865: 8, No. 18; Traversari 1986: 141, No. 47), where the *nebris* is draped diagonally across the chest in an inverted V-shape very similar to that of the Alexandrian piece. The Venetian statue is datable to the middle of the 2nd century BC, which may help define the chronological range of the lost Alexandrian original and its later reproduction as a *monopodium*.

The two figures, despite their different superficial execution, movement, and mode of representation, are nevertheless presented together as a group, which is another characteristic of late Hellenistic sculpture. Therefore, the date of carving of this Alexandrian *monopodium* could be placed in the late Hellenistic period, perhaps in the 1st century BC, because of its dependence on the Marching Farmer and the Odysseus from Antikythera. However, the popularity of the Satyr body type in many Roman copies of the Dionysiac support type (Schröder Group N) may suggest a Roman date (Schröder 1989: 147–157, Pls XV–XVIII). The absence of any plastic treatment of the eye's inner detail may suggest the Hadrianic period as a *terminus ante quem*. It therefore seems reasonable to place the possible date of the *monopodium* between the 1st century BC and the 2nd century AD. If a more precise date is sought, however, the 1st century AD to the first two decades of the 2nd century AD would be preferable, particularly in view of the uncarved eye details.

The original Alexandrian artwork likely dates to the late 3rd or early 2nd century BC. The Pergamene Baroque style is very comparable to the execution of the Satyr, while the triangular form of the group relates to the Pasquino and the Boy and Goose groups. The Maenad has already been compared to the Mem-

phite Siren and the Baker Dancer. It is therefore reasonable to connect this creation with the reign of Ptolemy IV or his successor because of the Dionysiac character of the group and the ruler's devotion to the god of wine and theater.

FUNCTION

The characteristics of the Satyr–Maenad fragment leave little doubt that it was a *monopodium*, or figured table leg. The group, carved from a single block of marble, stands before a tapering pillar; the rear surface is only summarily finished, whereas the front and sides are carefully worked. Such an arrangement, in which a mythological pair is carved almost in the round against a vertical strut, is typical of Roman marble *monopodia* (Ajootian 2000: 491, 501). Comparable supports reinforce this functional identification. A marble Silenos with a wineskin in the Argos Museum combines a Dionysiac figure with an unworked reverse and a continuous pillar supporting the tabletop (Marcadé and Raftopoulou 1963: 171, No. 167, Fig. 97); the Eros and Psyche group in the Chatsworth Collection, carved in one piece with a rear support, has likewise been identified as a *monopodium* (Boschung, von Hesberg, and Linfert 1997: 95, No. 103, Pl. 84,2); and the Eros and Psyche groups at Crotone and Göttingen, each carved in one piece with a rear support, have also been recognized as *monopodia* (Moss 1988: 386–388, Nos A1–A2).[6]

Typically, these supports rise above the figures to bear the weight of a tabletop. The Satyr–Maenad group is preserved to a height of about 40 cm; allowing for the missing base and capital, its original height can be estimated at roughly 90–120 cm — well within the normal range for such supports, which Feuser (2010: 649), defining the *monopodium* as a single-support table whose base and pillar carry one or more figures that are decorative rather than load-bearing, reports as generally between about 0.90 m and 1.20 m.

The iconography is equally consistent with a convivial context. Satyrs and Maenads are Dionysiac companions and commonly appear on banquet furniture; *monopodia* often depict Dionysiac revelers, Erotes, or other mythical figures suitable for wine-drinking settings (Ajootian 2000: 497). At the same time, figural table legs were not confined to private dining rooms; evidence shows that they were used in domestic atria and peristyles as display tables and could be repurposed as altars or offering tables in sanctuaries and tombs (Moss 1988: 279–280; Cohon 1984: 6–7; Ajootian 2000: 501). Marble table supports are also documented as votive furniture presented to temples (Anabolu 1991: 71). Therefore, both domestic and cultic contexts may be proposed for this new Alexandrian *monopodium*.

If this functional identification is accepted, inv. 3577 takes its place within a small but significant group of table supports in stone and wood attested

6 The putto is another figural type commonly employed on such *monopodia*, particularly in central Italy; see, for example, the putto support from Herdonia now in the Museo Civico at Foggia (Moss 1988: 473, No. A103).

in Graeco-Roman Egypt, including the animal-shaped legs in the Cairo Museum (Edgar 1903: 65, Nos 27591–27595, 27602, Pl. XXX).[7] A more decorative series of *monopodia* with mythical subjects is preserved in Alexandria (Habachi 1942: 110, Pl. XXV, Fig. 1; Adriani 1961/II: 29, No. 112, Pl. 62, Figs 196–197),[8] to which must be added the high-quality Dionysus–Satyr table leg from Abū Mīnā — the closest comparandum to the present piece and the strongest evidence for Attic workshops supplying figural supports along the North African coast (Engemann 1998: Pls 1–2; for the find context, Pl. 5c).[9] Further occurrences include a black-basalt boxer-*monopodium* in Cairo (Ashour 2013: Figs 1–4).[10] Virtually all documented examples derive from Hellenized *poleis* or *metropoleis*, confirming the association of this furniture type with urban, elite domestic environments (Ashour 2013).[11]

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Between 1897 and 1898, clearance works along the fortification ditch on Rue Gallis Bey, modern Sultan Hussein Street, south of the Government Hospital, revealed architectural and sculptural remains. The site lies on the southern slope of Hospital Hill; within the ancient city, it lies in the southern part of the Royal Quarter (*Basileia*), north of Canopic Street and a short distance southeast of the Caesareum [*Fig. 7*]. The work was supervised by Dr Schiess Bey and published soon afterward by Giuseppe Botti (1898: 60–62). The finds are reported to include foundations of finely cut nummulitic limestone and reused granite drums aligned with El-Falaki's Street grid. From the same level came painted architectural elements, including two Alexandrian painted Corinthian limestone

7 Edgar (1903: 65) lists a lion-headed leg in white marble (CG 27591), three panther legs in granite and alabaster (CG 27592–27594), and further examples; the wooden leg CG 27602 reportedly came from the Fayum.

8 The series includes a marble Eros carrying a butterfly; a Bellerophon riding Pegasus from the Eastern Necropolis, plausibly interpreted as a funerary symbol of apotheosis; and a lion-shaped table leg from a tomb at Gabbari (Ashour 2013: 37).

9 On stylistic grounds, particularly body proportions, drill technique, and the harmonious parallelism of its two-figure composition, Engemann assigns the piece to the Attic group of Imperial-period table legs and dates it to the third quarter of the 2nd century AD. He does so against an isotope analysis that identified the marble as Asia Minor (Aphrodisias/Ephesos), a result he regards as doubtful given the absence of comparable two-figure supports in those centers' production (Engemann 1998: 169). For the wider distribution of Attic figural table legs along the North African littoral, see Stefanidou-Tiveriou 1993: 233 No. 5, 257 No. 70, 285 No. 142 (Cyrene), 234 No. 7 (Sabratha), and 261 No. 81.

10 A black-basalt *monopodium* in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (Basement Register No. 967) represents a young boxer wearing a Roman caestus, dated to the first half of the 3rd century AD; it is only the second known occurrence of this athletic subject on a Roman *monopodium* (Ashour 2013).

11 The pattern is reinforced by the geographic distribution: Alexandria above all, but also the Fayum, Marsa Matruh, and Abū Mīnā (Ashour 2013).

capitals (GRM 3802, 3861) and a Graeco-Egyptian composite capital whose abacus bears a winged sun-disk above acanthus leaves and lotus petals (GRM 3860), together with a black-granite Corinthian capital fragment (GRM G 1058), all from the so-called "*Tempio policromo*".[12] This location is labeled Site 112 at Mazarita in Tkaczow's topographical plan (Tkaczow 1993: 152, 221–222), corresponding to Site 50 on Adriani's 1934 plan of Alexandria (Adriani 1934: 76–77).

Botti (1898: 60–62) interpreted the remains as those of a Greek temple later converted into a Christian church, noting an early phase built in finely worked local limestone with Ionic and Corinthian members, some preserving traces of paint. His catalog records a mixed assemblage combining Sarapis-related sculptures with Dionysiac material (Botti 1898: 60–61). It was the abundance of painted limestone architectural elements that led Botti to name the ruins *Tempio policromo* (Tkaczow 1993: 152).

More recently, Riedel's synthesis of the excavation records and museum inventories assigned these painted capitals and composite elements to a larger colonnaded building complex opening onto Street L2, most probably Ptolemaic in date and remaining in use into the Ro-

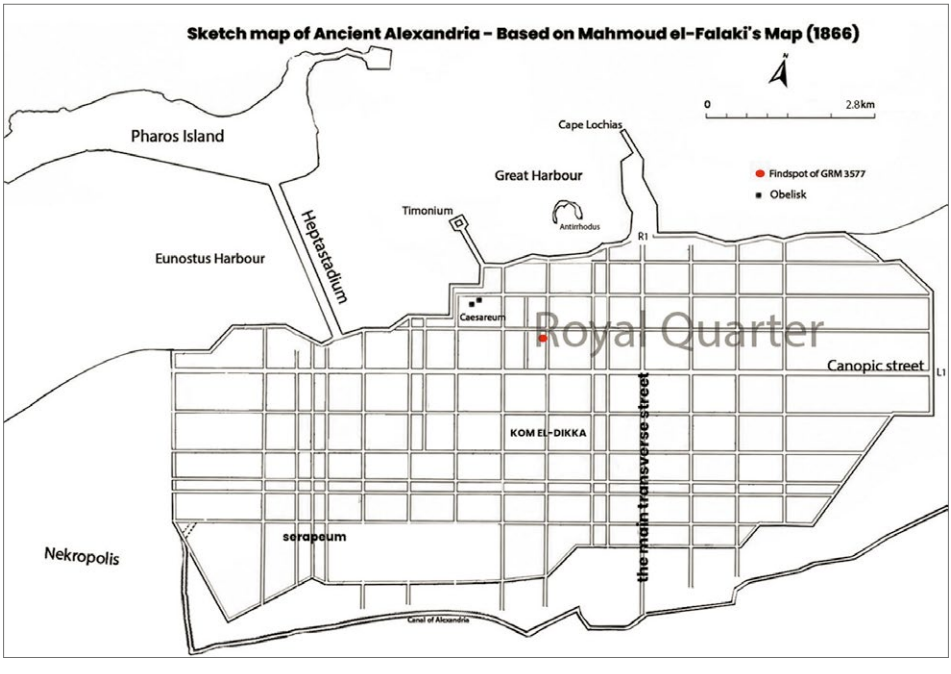

Fig. 7. Sketch map of ancient Alexandria, based on Mahmoud el-Falaki's map (1866), with the findspot of GRM 3577 marked by a red dot (Drawing by A. Osama)

12 The remains were removed in 1898, so when Ferdinand Noack began excavating the spot in 1900, he could no longer see them; the granite columns from the site were moved to the gardens of the Government Hospital. The capitals (Objs 92, 93, 93A, 94) entered the Graeco-Roman Museum (Tkaczow 1993: 152, 221–222; cf. Riedel 2020: 413).

man period (Riedel 2020: 413). According to Botti's original report, the Hospital Hill finds included Sarapis-related pieces occurring alongside Dionysiac fragments, including a panther head, a goat frieze, and a faun embracing a nymph — presumably the piece studied here (Botti 1898: 60–61).

The findspot lies within the street grid first established by Mahmoud el-Falaki in his survey of ancient Alexandria, conducted in 1866 and published in 1872 (Mahmoud el-Falaki 1872). On the basis of the El-Falaki grid, Tkaczow (1993: 152–153) locates the assemblage in the modern Mazarita district, along the widthwise Street R3, approximately 20 m south of its intersection with the lengthwise Street L2; the building occupied part of the insula bounded by Streets L1, L2, R2, and R3 (Riedel 2020: 413).

Adriani's Point 50 (Adriani 1934: 76–77, No. 50) has been georeferenced against current satellite imagery in order to locate this historical topographical feature within the modern urban fabric of Alexandria. The point corresponds most plausibly to the present-day line of Sultan Hussein Street, south of the Government Hospital, at its intersection with Museum Street.

A more cautious view emerges from the later investigations. Of the soundings Noack carried out across Hospital Hill, the one relevant to this site was Trench G, dug a few meters west of Street R3, which recovered nothing of the *Tempio policromo* itself (Tkaczow 1993: 152–153; cf. Adriani 1934: 76–77, No. 50, correlating Noack's trenches with his site numbers).

The architectural fragments attributed to the building span a broad range —some date to the turn of the 1st century BC and 1st century AD, others as early as the 3rd century BC— so that Tkaczow (1993: 153) regarded the structure as a Ptolemaic building that remained in use into the Early Roman period rather than as a single, securely identified monument.

Building on the documentation of Botti and Noack together with later architectural inventories, Riedel (2020: 413) assigns the area to the Ptolemaic–Roman *Basileia* of Alexandria (Site 3.10, *Tempio policromo*), noting that the painted architectural elements —Corinthian limestone capitals with traces of polychromy, a composite capital, and fragments of a painted limestone frieze and an Ionic entablature— belong to a larger colonnaded complex aligned with Street L2 and repeatedly modified over time. The Hospital Hill assemblage includes clear Dionysiac material: the Satyr–Maenad *monopodium* and a panther head, as that Botti (1898: 60–61, Cat. Nos 7, 9) believed, had belonged to a group of Dionysus with his panther, alongside a goat frieze, a head of Sarapis, and architectural fragments. This mix raises a simple but important question:[13] does the findspot belong to a private house or to the meeting place of a Dionysiac association (*thiasos*)? The cult of Dionysus was deeply rooted in Alexandria from the early Ptolemaic period onward, and associations devoted to the god are known from inscriptions and papyri across Graeco-Roman Egypt (Nilsson 1957: 45–52; Fraser 1972/I: 201–207). Such associations operated largely within a pri-

13 The authors thank Paul Stanwick for raising this question (personal communication, 2026).

vate framework, so the surviving evidence often blurs the line between their religious gatherings and ordinary domestic or social life, especially where no inscriptions are preserved (Jaccottet 2003/I: 141–148).

A good example is the Athenian Iobacchoi inscription (IG II² 1368), which describes a *thiasos* hall fitted with couches and Bacchic decoration, a setting that could easily pass for a wealthy dining room (Nilsson 1957: 47–48). Since the Hospital Hill finds lack altars, cult inscriptions, or any clear ritual installation, neither option can be confirmed. Still, the strong Dionysiac character of the sculptural finds fits equally well with a collegial hall and an elite domestic interior.

CONCLUSION

The reconsideration of inv. 3577 proposed here brings together three lines of inquiry —function, type, and context— which converge on a clearer understanding of the piece than has previously been achieved.

The carving in a single block, the summarily worked rear, and, above all, the tapering pillar rising behind the figures leave little doubt that the fragment is a *monopodium* rather than a votive statuette. Its estimated original height of about 90–120 cm falls within Feuser's documented range, and its Dionysiac subject belongs to the standard repertoire of figural table supports. Inv. 3577 thus joins the small but growing corpus of marble *monopodia* from Graeco-Roman Egypt, alongside the Abū Mīnā Dionysus–Satyr leg and the Cairo boxer support.

Typologically, the group has no exact parallel. Its composition combines characteristics of the Dionysiac support type, the Eros–Psyche chin-chuck motif, the Baker Dancer, and the pyramidal structure of the Pasquino and Boy-and-Goose group — an eclectic mix best explained as a later reproduction of a lost Alexandrian original, most plausibly created in the late 3rd or early 2nd century BC under Ptolemy IV or V, with possible Rhodian affinities. The surviving piece itself is best placed between the 1st century BC and the first two decades of the 2nd century AD.

The archaeological context resists any single reading. Following Tkaczow and Riedel, the Hospital Hill material is best understood not as a single coherent monument but as part of a larger Ptolemaic–Roman building complex on the southern fringe of the *Basileia*, one that remained in use into the Roman period; its surviving finds, which lack altars, cult inscriptions, or any clear ritual installation, do not point to a single, securely defined function. Within this setting, the *monopodium* fits equally well with an elite domestic interior and with the meeting hall of a Dionysiac *thiasos* — two settings that are often hard to tell apart in the archaeological record when no inscriptions survive.

In sum, the piece is a small but eloquent witness to the afterlife of a lost Hellenistic Alexandrian composition in Roman-period furniture, to the persistence of Dionysiac imagery in the domestic sphere, and to the later life of the *Basileia* as a lived-in part of the Roman city.

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How to cite this article: Osama, A., Kikuchi, T., Abdel-Maksoud, G., and Ashour, S. (2026). A Dionysiac *monopodium* from the Royal Quarter of Alexandria and its original type. *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean,* 35.1, 247–268. https://doi.org/10.37343/uw.2083 537X.pam35.1.08

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Abbreviations

Mimiamb	Herodas, *Mimiambi* (I.C. Cunningham, ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971
Pliny, *NH*	Pliny the Elder, *Natural history* IX. *Libri XXXIII–XXXV* (H. Rackham, trans.). London–Cambridge, MA: Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1952

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