

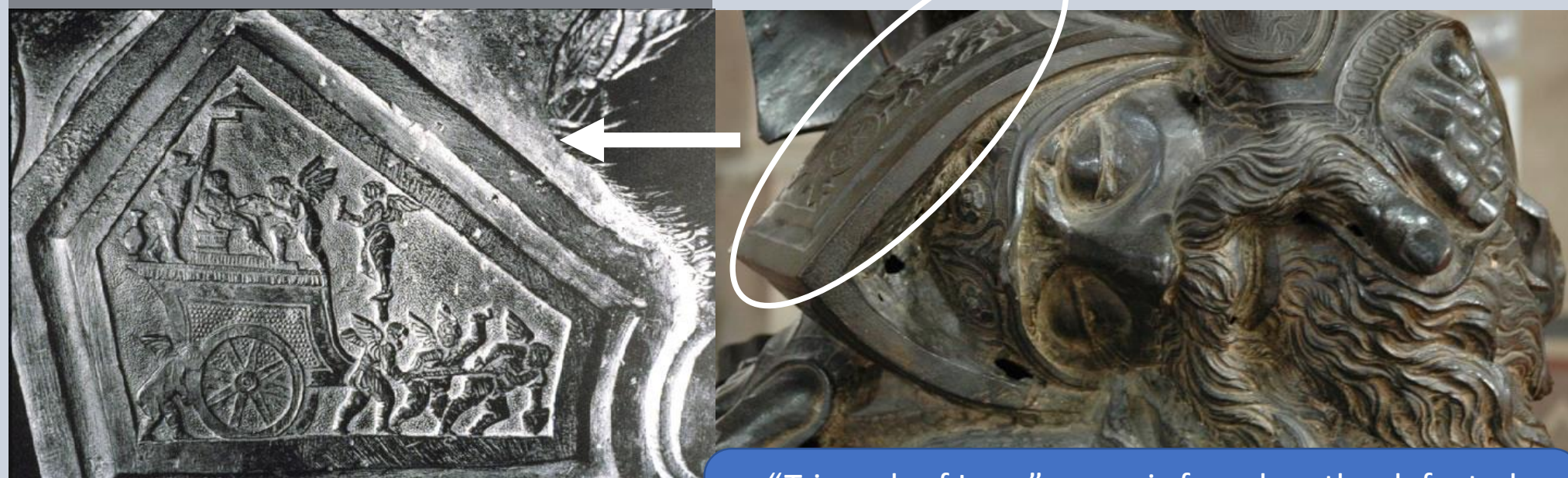
The Bronze Boy: Donatello's Ideal Lover

Jennifer Wright, History, Dr. Lilian Joyce, Art History

Overview

Because of its fame and beauty many scholars have avoided discussing the sexually provocative elements of Donatello's Bronze David. The sexual nature of this work has been interpreted by many scholars as an expression of Donatello's homosexuality. This interpretation, held by scholars such as H. W. Janson and Laurie Schneider, disregards the age of the model and how medieval Florentines understood sexuality. However, if the Bronze David is an expression of Donatello's sexual desires, it should be interpreted through the lens of pederasty, not homosexuality. I believe The Bronze David represents the ideal young male lover in a pederastic relationship and also highlights the dangers of engaging in such a practice both spiritually and physically.

"Triumph of Love" Scene



"Triumph of Love" scene is found on the defeated Goliath. This is perhaps intended to be ironic. A victory in love lead to his defeat.

Pederasty

Homosexuality as a concept, did not exist in the pre-modern world. Pederasty, however, was the virtually normative form of homosexual relations in medieval Florence. Pederasty is a sexual relationship between a pubescent boy and an adult male. Within ancient Greece and Rome, pederasty was common and openly practiced. Though Christianity made pederasty illegal it persisted behind closed doors into the medieval era. Donatello was not only inspired by these civilizations but was also rumored to be an "unrepentant pederast" himself.



Classical Art

Donatello was heavily influenced by the art and culture of classical Greece and Rome. However, instead of referencing the heroic nude poses of classical male sculptures, Donatello positioned David in a way which mimicked sensual female positions of a female nude. In body type, David has similar features common to depictions of the dual gendered God Hermaphroditus.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Joyce, Dr. Gandila, and my husband Jake for their continuing patience, encouragement, and support through my academic career.



Donatello's Bronze David

Donatello's Marble David

The Medici

By 1415, Cosimo de'Medici was the great cultural patron and unofficial landlord of Florence. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the Medici were fostering an environment in which sodomy could be practiced secretly, if not openly (but remained officially illegal). Cosimo seems to have been unperturbed by Donatello's sexual preferences and was the artist's faithful friend and patron. With this support, Donatello had the freedom to express himself openly.



Hermaphroditus

David

Antinous

Biblical David

The relationship between David and Jonathan has been a controversial subject for biblical scholars in recent years. I argue that a medieval audience could have interpreted their relationship as pederasty. Not only was David a symbol of Florence but was a beautiful boy who captured the attention of the mature warrior prince Jonathan.