

In memory of Charles Edwards

A forged masterpiece

Robert Cohon

A brilliantly sculpted oscillum in The Detroit Institute of Arts depicts a dancing Kallimachian maenad (type Hauser 25) on one side and an auloi-playing satyr (type Hauser 23) with a prancing panther on the other (figs. 1-2). An elaborate molding dominated by a cyma reversa frames the tondo. Carved of white medium-grain marble, which is probably Greek, the large oscillum is 42.86 cm in diameter and 4.45 cm thick at its edge. The museum purchased the sculpture in 1945 from a dealer who claimed that it had been found near Rome in 1936. In the early 1960's the tondo was accidentally knocked over and broken into 5 large pieces that were skillfully restored. Later, high quality copies of it were made and marketed in the United States. After its initial and brief publication in 1946 as a Roman sculpture from the 1st c. B.C. or A.D., the oscillum received no scholarly attention until 1995, when it was published as an example of the Roman use of Kallimachian maenads. This most beautiful oscillum is in all likelihood, however, a forgery.¹

While the absence of encrustation, a patina, or root-marks on the oscillum could be explained as the result of the over-zealous cleaning of an antiquity, an important aspect of its preservation almost proves that the tondo is forged. Most of the surface of the reliefs is in poor or mediocre condition. Each artistically significant area, however, is well preserved, as are a very few other areas of secondary or little importance. With the exception of a few nicks, the satyr's face and hands (fig. 3), the panther's head, and the head of the panther skin are perfectly preserved; so too are the adjacent backgrounds. The only other areas so well preserved on this side are: the satyr's back, penis, buttocks, left ankle, and lower right leg; a small part of the panther skin behind him; the panther's left forepaw and the end of his tail; and 5 small sections of the rim. The remaining surface, about 85% of this side of the tondo, is corroded. On the other side, the maenad's face and adjacent background are well preserved (fig. 4); so too are her left breast, lower left arm, the back of her *kolpos*, and much of her *apoptygma*. The only other well-preserved areas are the lower quarter of her dress, the end of the mantle below her knife, the part of her mantle between her left arm and body, and 5 small sections of the rim.

1 Acc. no. 45.130. Touchette 1995, 31 n.187; 38-39, 41-42, 71 cat. no.12 pl.14 b,c; *Bulletin of The Detroit Institute of Arts* 25 (1946) 24, 63. The molding is composed of a cyma reversa framed by a small horizontal element and a longer vertical element with a narrow intervening channel. The average grain-size of the semi-translucent marble is approximately 1 mm. The restoration of the oscillum was by Ternbach. Practical difficulties have almost precluded a scientific analysis to determine the marble type.

For oscilla in general: Corswandt 1982 and Dwyer 1981 passim; E. Dwyer, *Pompeian domestic sculpture* (Archaeologica 28, Rome 1982) 119, 129-34; J.-M. Pailler, "Les oscilla retrouvés," *MEFRA* 94 (1982) 743-822; Froning 1981, 13-14. For recent specialized studies: H.-U. Cain, "Chronologie, Ikonographie und Bedeutung der römischen Maskenreliefs," *BonnJb* 188 (1988) 107-221; J.-M. Pailler, "Deux oscilla trouvés à Toulouse," *RAN* 16 (1983) 385-93; "Attis, Polyphème et le thiase bachique," *MEFRA* 83 (1971) 127-39; "A propos d'un nouvel oscillum de Bolsena," *MEFRA* 81 (1969) 627-58. Unpublished oscilla on the art market (authenticity has not been confirmed by first hand study): Sotheby's, New York, 13/6/96, lot 90; 12-13/12/91, lot 244; Christie's, London, 10/7/87, lot 1; Sotheby's, New York, 8-9/2/85, lot 403; Sotheby Parke Bernet Inc., New York, 11/12/80, lot 170; Sotheby's, London, 9/7/74, lot 177.

The Detroit oscillum is large by Pompeian standards (Dwyer 1981, 289; for the few comparably sized, round Pompeian oscilla, see Dwyer 1981, nos. 1, 25, 32, 80, 135). Several more 40+ cm round oscilla exist elsewhere, but they constitute a small number relative to all the examples under 40 cm (Corswandt 1982, nos. K8-9, 19, 26-27, 44, 80, 84, 86, 92, 106, 110, 124, 136-37; A 14-16). Most of those over 55 cm are from Hadrian's Villa (Corswandt 1982, nos. A17-19, 22, 24, 26, 29-34; the few from elsewhere are: nos. K30, K112-13, K123).