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A River-God in Drag? Interpreting a Male *Peplophoros*

The garment known as *peplos* is constructed as feminine in both literature and artistic representations. As I have argued elsewhere, the *peplophoros* in Early Classical sculpture represents an iconographic construct of an idealized feminine Hellenic identity. What are we to make, then, of the remarkable find of a male *peplophoros*: a bronze statuette from Euboia representing the river-god Acheloös as a bearded man wearing a *peplos* and *chiton*? While it is possible that the garment represents a misunderstanding of *peplos*-iconography on the part of a provincial artist, this paper argues that the representation of a male figure in feminine dress was deliberate.

Acheloös, the longest river in Greece, was believed to be the source of all seas, rivers and springs. He is represented in Greek art beginning in the seventh century in several forms: as a human figure, as a bull-man, as a triton, and as a centaur. He frequently engages in combat with Heracles. The fact that Acheloös is usually represented in such virile terms makes his appearance in a *peplos* all the more surprising. How can this apparent anomaly be explained?

A literary parallel for the *peplos*-clad Acheloös is Heracles, who, in Diodorus Siculus' account of the life of the hero, is given a *peplos* by Athena. As demonstrated by Nicole Loraux, the feminine *peplos* is an appropriate garment for the hero who is so excessively masculine as to be in danger of expending all his virility; the *peplos* does not therefore feminize him, but rather serves to restore the hero to a place within the human limits of *andreia*. This paper argues that the same is true for the figure of Acheloös, who is regularly depicted in excessively masculine terms (so excessive, in fact, that he is represented as part beast). The representation of the river-god wearing a *peplos* can therefore be interpreted as emphasizing the benevolent side of his character, as suggested also by the cornucopia.