

Odysseus at Ancient Corinth

An under life size male marble figure (S 1859), found in the central Forum at ancient Corinth, may provide evidence for a three-dimensional Homeric scene displayed in the Roman city. Lacking head, arms, and legs below the knees, the figure wears a chitoniskos and long mantle. He raised both arms and apparently took a lunging step upward with his left leg. A small non-joining head fragment at Corinth (S 1139) preserving a pilos hat and tousled hair may belong to this figure. Striking parallels for costume and pose are found in large and small Roman statue groups from both public and private contexts. They re-enact the Homeric episode of Odysseus and his men in the cave of Polyphemos. The hero, wearing pilos, tunic, and cape flowing behind him, steps up to his left onto a rocky surface, raising a cup of wine to the Cyclops, who sits with his feet atop the body of dead Greek warrior. This scene was depicted in small-scale terracotta at a Roman villa in Italy near Muracche di Tortoreto (Abruzzi). The group, ca first century A.D., included not only Odysseus and Polyphemos, but also four Muses, alluding to Homer and the ancient poetic tradition that generated this story. At Corinth, the figure of Polyphemos has not yet been recognized, but a small marble Muse (S 842), possibly Melpomene, plus fragments of two others (S 223, 311) found close to the statue of Odysseus, might belong with him, forming a similar sculptural vignette in the city's Forum.