

Palladas and the Prima Porta Cupid

Among the most iconic statues of the ancient world, the Augustus from Prima Porta has become a staple in discussions of Roman art. The figure's ornate breastplate, evocative stance, and orderly locks have fascinated both scholars and casual admirers alike since its discovery, and have stimulated a number of fruitful studies. As a by-product of the focus on these more popular elements, though, some of the statue's less prominent features have been overshadowed. The dolphin-riding Cupid beside the statue's right leg is one such feature which has unfortunately received less attention than is due. The small god is more often than not relegated to brief, fleeting comments within larger considerations (Studniczka 1910; Patroni 1941-1942; Simon 1957, 1986, 1991; Kähler 1959) and, even in the few discussions which do examine the figure at any length, this rider and his dolphin are unceremoniously broken down into separate images with secondary implications (esp. Hohl 1938 on Cupid and Zanker 1988 on the dolphin). No one has yet focused on the Prima Porta Cupid in its own right, questioned its specific attributes, or attempted to reconstruct the image and its individual significance. Therefore, this paper seeks to do just that by contextualizing those attributes which remain and investigating the little-studied object missing from the Cupid's right hand, all in light of his striking placement beside Augustus as *imperator*.

In addition to comparing this figure to appearances of Cupid in other prominent Augustan works, I here pay particular attention to a description of Eros in a little-known epigram attributed to Palladas, an Alexandrian poet of the fourth century C.E. (*A.P.* 16.207). In short, the epigram provides evidence of a specific image type which coheres well with the motifs present in the Prima Porta statue and thus prompts further comparison. Of particular note, Palladas' Eros is disarmed yet represents "power over land and sea" via his hold on a dolphin and a flower. This

and additional parallels suggest that the Prima Porta Cupid, like Palladas' Eros, deliberately grasps the dolphin upon which he is seated, and that he once held a flower in the drill hole in his right hand. The image as a whole, then, displays a combination of attributes which are both previously attested and congruent with developing trends in the art and literature of the Augustan period (esp. Zanker 1988; Pollini 2012).

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