

HEAD OF APOLLO

ROMAN, MID 2ND CENTURY AD
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 55 CM.

WIDTH: 38 CM.

DEPTH: 40 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*IN A EUROPEAN COLLECTION FROM THE
18TH-19TH CENTURY, JUDGING FROM THE
RESTORATION TECHNIQUES.*

*ACQUIRED BY DEALER PINO DONATI AT
THE END OF THE 1960S. THEN IN A
JAPANESE COLLECTION.*

*IN A SWISS PRIVATE COLLECTION,
ACQUIRED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE
1980S.*

PASSED DOWN BY THE FORMER.



This remarkable marble head represents the god Apollo. Created in the Roman period in about the middle of the 2nd century AD, it was probably part of an eminent, larger than life statue.



The sculpting of the face demonstrates great virtuosity, with its graceful contours, firm, polished flesh and harmonious composition. Depicted from the front, head slightly inclined towards his right, Apollo's attitude seems energetic. This representation conveys a natural grace and a distinct poise, perceptible in the god's fixed gaze. The gentleness of his face expresses a divine serenity and tranquillity, classic characteristics of representations of Apollo. His finely carved almond-shaped eyes are surmounted with delicate eyelids of a remarkable subtlety, marked by deep incisions that extend beneath each brow bone. Those hollows accentuate the relief of his eyelids, while giving his gaze a certain



intensity. His brows are not obviously etched, instead, they are suggested by the delicate hollows formed by his upper lids, a detail that, while intangible, only adds to the fineness of the sculpture and attests to the sculptor's talent for representing volumes and subtle transitions between shapes. Apollo's nose, now missing, was previously restored, as shown by the visible traces of the fracture, which are now smooth. This type of restoration is common in the history of antique sculptures. The mouth of our Apollo, with its delicately parted lips, seems to be frozen in an enigmatic expression, as though about to let out a word or a song. Thin, subtly traced incisions highlight the contours of his cheeks and chin, recalling the careful rendering of his brow. His cheeks thus look full and his chin well-shaped. Our statue's long neck, majestic and impressive, suggests that it belonged to a monumental whole. The marks on its lower part also attest to an old restoration, probably from the 18th century.



Our magnificent head of Apollo is distinguished by refined, meticulously represented hair, a key element of the aesthetic ideal of the Roman imperial period and, more precisely, of the 2nd century AD. Particular attention was paid to his hairstyle, as well as the wavy hair adorning the deity's head. Pulled back in a large knot resting elegantly upon the nape of his neck, our Apollo's hair partly covers his ears. Precisely sculpted with a drill, each lock was carefully carved into the marble, creating a sharp, distinct separation between each one. That detail made it possible to accentuate the volume of Apollo's hair, through a subtle play of light and shadow, which seems to animate it and add greater depth. Apollo's hairstyle is divided into six sections symmetrically arranged on either side of his face, creating a visual harmony that sublimates our head. Finally, the waves of his hair flow seamlessly down from the top of his head in an elegant continuity. At the back of his head, two missing rectangular features attest to an old restoration that is now missing. A small lead rod located at the back of the sculpture seems to have been added later on, probably in the 18th century, to place the work against a wall. These technical elements attest to the work's journey through the centuries. On either side of our Apollo's head, a magnificently curly lock tumbles down from behind his ears, framing his face. These particularly detailed locks cascade down his neck and probably came to rest over his shoulders, now missing. The entire hairstyle demonstrates the quest for regularity and geometricity that characterised the art of the imperial period. Finally, the patina on the sculpture, a consequence of the passing of time, confers a certain enigmatic aura upon the head,

heightening our sculpture's mystifying dimension.



Radiant with majesty, this head is imposing in its power and serenity, embodying Apollo in all of his divine splendour. Apollo was the son of Zeus and Leto and the twin brother of Artemis and, as such, he occupied a central place in the Graeco-Roman pantheon. He was the god of sun, light and masculine beauty, and also reigned over the arts – song, poetry, dance and music – and symbolised universal harmony. As the patron of the muses, he remains the ultimate embodiment of the classical ideal, a timeless model of physical and spiritual perfection. His renown is such that, from antiquity to the present day, he has been one of the most represented deities in art. The statues in his image, discovered all around the Mediterranean Sea, attest to the magnitude of his influence. Apollo is often represented with abundant, flowing curls that spill elegantly over his

shoulders or his torso, sometimes styled in a knot or encircled with a laurel crown according to the representation and theme.



Our head of Apollo is in keeping with the classical iconography of Apollo Citharoedus or Apollo Citharede, a common representation of the god of poetry and music in Graeco-Roman art. This typology depicts Apollo holding a cithara (or lyre), the iconic instrument of his musical practice. According to the variant, he is depicted either sitting, in a calm, majestic position (Ill. 1), or standing, with the suggestion of a slight movement, energetic and inspired. The latter type applies to works such as the Vatican's Apollo Musagete (Ill. 2), which conveys a dynamic impetus steeped in lyricism. Another is the Barberini type (Ill. 3), in which he adopts a more ethereal, serene attitude.

Our sculpture shares an essential characteristic with the Barberini type: the

frontality of his face, angled slightly to the right, as well as the curly locks that frame his face and tumble elegantly down over his torso. However, although this arrangement recalls the hairstyle characteristic of the Barberini type, our head differs overall, particularly with the knot upon his head.

The Apollo Citharoedus preserved at the Vatican Museums (Ill. 4), on the other hand, has a hairstyle much more similar to that of our Apollo. A central parting divides his wavy locks into five sections on either side, which are gathered into a neat knot at the back of his head. A curly lock tumbles from behind each partly hidden ear, in the style characteristic of Apollo. However, the Vatican's statue has a laurel crown, unlike our head, which is a noteworthy difference in the deity's presentation. Despite that, the similarities between both hairstyles are evident, as are the similarities between the features and angles of both faces, frontal, with the head somewhat tilted to his right, regular features, a round face and a serene expression.



Another interesting sculpture (Ill. 5), preserved at the Louvre, displays a significant similarity with our head. Devoid of a crown, it displays a hairstyle almost identical to ours, but the posture is less frontal, introducing a slightly different dynamic.



The most striking similarities are with the statue of a Dionysus Citharoedus (Ill. 6 and 7) dating from 340 to 330 BC and preserved at the Archaeological Museum of Delos. Although its subject has traditionally been identified as Dionysus, some art historians suggest that it could actually be an Apollo Citharoedus. This statue, which shares many stylistic traits with our head, presents a frontal posture, a head slightly inclined to the right, a mouth with delicately parted lips and an expression imbued with serenity, details that resonate strongly with those of our sculpture. The hair, a central part of this resemblance, is also remarkably similar: in

both cases, the curly hair is arrayed symmetrically, framing Apollo's face and partly covering his ears. The two defining curly locks, which tumble elegantly over his torso, are a distinctive feature of Apollo's hairstyle in this iconography. The details of his face such as the almond-shaped eyes and long neck, as well as the delicate way of suggesting the shape of his brows with his eyelids, all contribute to the striking resemblance.

As Martin Flashar underlines in his work *Apollon Kitharodos* ("Apollo Citharoedus"), Cologne, 1992, pp. 56 and 134, Fig. 106ff), our head could be an imperial copy from the 2nd century AD, inspired by an original dating from 160-150 BC and now missing. Our head is thus the fascinating echo of an artistic tradition that began with major works such as those of Delos, fusing classicism and innovation to glorify the representation of the god of music and poetry. This dialogue between different eras highlights the evolution and adaptation of Apollo's divine image, while still preserving the ideological foundations of a timeless aesthetic ideal.

Our head also has a unique history. Acquired in the 1960s by the trader Pino Donati, it was then part of a private collection in Japan before being lent to the Antikenmuseum Basel in 1982, where it stayed until 2024. The work was placed on display at the museum for several exhibitions and, in 1989, a cast (Ill. 8) was made, which is now preserved at the Skulpturhalle in Basel.

Comparatives:



Ill. 1 Apollo Citharoedus, Roman, AD 130-138, marble, H.: 295 cm. Archaeological Museum of Burdur, Turkey.



Ill. 2 Statue of Apollo Citharoedus, Roman, 1st half of the 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 202 cm. Vatican Museums.



Ill.3 Apollo Barberini, Roman, 1st-2nd century AD, marble. Glyptothek, Munich, probably a copy of the Apollo Citharoedus sculpted by Scopas, Germany.



Ill. 4 Statue of Apollo Citharoedus, Roman, 1st half of the 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 202 cm. Vatican Museums.

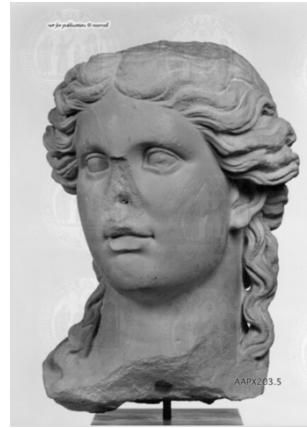


Ill.5 Apollo Citharoedus, Roman, 150–50 BC, bronze, H.: 68 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Ill.6 and Ill.7 Apollo or Dionysus Citharoedus, Greek, 340–330 BC. Archaeological Museum of Delphi, Greece.

Provenance:



Ill.8 Apollo Citharoedus, 1989, plaster (cast). Skulpturhalle, Basel, Germany.

Publications:

Martin Flashar, Apollon Kitharodos ("Apollo Citharoedus"), Cologne, 1992, pp. 56 and 134, Fig. 106ff.

Exhibition

On loan to the Antikenmuseum Basel, 1982–2024 (on display in the 1980s and 1990s).