

# FARNESE HERCULES

ROMAN, 2<sup>ND</sup> CENTURY AD  
MARBLE  
HEAD RESTORED IN THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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HEIGHT: 55 CM.

WIDTH: 21 CM.

DEPTH: 16 CM.

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*PROVENANCE:*  
*IN AN EUROPEAN COLLECTION FROM*  
*THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BASED ON THE*  
*RESTORATION TECHNIQUES.*  
*THEN IN AN AMERICAN PRIVATE*  
*COLLECTION FROM*  
*THE 1950S.*



This statue of a middle-aged man in a resting position depicts the demi-god Hercules in heroic nudity. Its statuary type is that of the Farnese Hercules.

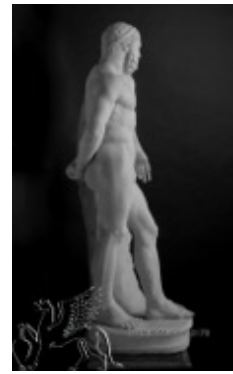


His left leg is forward, slightly flexed, while his supporting leg, the right, is tensed. The position tilts his hips significantly, drawing attention to the prominent muscles of our man's torso. The inclined line of his hips contrasts with the line of his shoulders, giving the body a pronounced 'S' shape. This position, also known as contrapposto, is a Greek invention from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, introduced by the sculptor Polyclitus. At the time, he was looking for the way to perfectly represent the human body and ultimately devised this new position.



Although his head is modern, the craftsmanship is of high quality, reminiscent of late Hellenistic creations. His face and thoughtful, serene expression respect the codes for the representation of the demi-god in statues of this type (Ill. 1). Hercules is hiding his right hand behind his back and, although it is now missing, based on the Farnese Hercules type, we can imagine that he was once holding the apples from the Garden of the Hesperides (Ill. 2). His left arm rests on a rocky mass – a club – cushioned with the Nemean lionskin, his main attributes. The lionskin reflects the skill and agility of the statue's first sculptor. The fur, the tooth lined maw, the eyes and the dangling paws are incredible in their precision and the delicacy with which they were executed. They add exceptional detail to the sculpture.

Hercules was the son of Zeus and one of his mistresses, Alcmena. From the moment he was born, Hera, Zeus' wife, made him the focal point of her jealousy. One night, she sent two snakes to the cradle of the young Hercules to kill him, but, endowed with truly 'Herculean' strength, he killed them with his bare hands. Years later, still obsessed with revenge, Hera drove Hercules mad. He killed his wife, Megara, and his sons. Upon the order of the Pythia, to atone for his crimes, he placed himself in the service of his enemy, Eurystheus. He entrusted Hercules with the renowned twelve Labours, the first of which was to kill the Nemean lion, which had an invulnerable skin, and the eleventh of which was to bring back apples from the Garden of the Hesperides, guarded by Ladon, a serpent like dragon with a hundred heads.



Ill. 1. Statuette of Hercules resting, Greek, 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC or Roman replica from the early imperial period, bronze, H.: 42.5 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no BR 652.

Ill. 2. Hercules resting, Roman, 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, marble, H.: 121 cm. Galleria Spada, Rome, inv. no. 342.



The Farnese Hercules type, representing Hercules in heroic nudity, right arm behind his back, the apples from the Garden of the Hesperides in his hand, and left arm resting on his lionskin covered club, was a representation that was much admired in

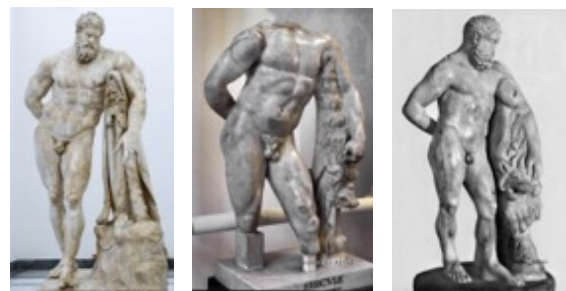


Antiquity. It represents the moment in which the hero, tired after his twelve Labours, allowed himself a moment of rest, leaning on his club and bearing the symbols of his first and penultimate Labours. Our statue thus offers a visual summary of the hero's journey.



The original model of this statue was created by the Greek sculptor Lysippus of Sicyon, who practiced his craft in the late 4th century BC. This statue, which was originally made of bronze and is now lost, is known to us through its many copies, including colossal statues and statuettes replete with details and emotion such as ours. With the Farnese Hercules type, the sculptor placed the hero's body in three-dimensional space. To see the statue in its entirety and understand its story, the viewer must walk around it, particularly to discover the apples. Whether by its mystery or depth, our statue is intriguing. Many copies

portray the Farnese type Hercules, the most famous of which is the Farnese Hercules from the eponymous collection that gave the statuary type its name, conserved at the National Archaeological Museum in Naples (Ill. 3). Other examples of statuettes of the Farnese type Hercules are conserved in prestigious European museums such as the Musée Saint Raymond in Toulouse (Ill. 4) and the Agora Museum in Athens (Ill. 5).



Ill. 3. Farnese Hercules, imperial period, marble, H.: 317 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. no. 6001.

Ill. 4. Hercules resting, Roman, 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, marble, H.: 62 cm. Musée Saint-Raymond, Toulouse, inv. no. RA. 115.

Ill. 5. Hercules resting, Roman, 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, marble, H.: 37.1 cm. Agora Museum, Athens, inv. no S.1241.

Our statue was part of a private European collection during the 18th century. In those times, it was common to recreate the heads of headless statues. The addition of the head is thus an integral part of the history of our Hercules and even enables us to date its restoration. The sculpture was then added to an American private collection from the 1950s.

