

# HERCULES CAPTURING THE CERYNEIAN HIND

ROMAN, 1<sup>ST</sup>-2<sup>ND</sup> CENTURY AD  
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 49 CM.

WIDTH: 29 CM.

DEPTH: 16 CM.

## *PROVENANCE:*

*IN THE COLLECTION OF GIOVANNI B. DELLA PORTA (1542-1597), CASA DELLI HEREDI, ITALY. ACQUIRED BY THE BORGHESE FAMILY IN 1609, STANZA DI DIOGENE, VILLA BORGHESE. MENTIONED BY GIACOMO MANILLI IN 1650, THEN BY DOMENICO MONTELATI IN 1700. IN THE COLLECTION OF LUDWIG MOND (1839-1909), THE POPLARS, LONDON. PASSED BY INHERITANCE INTO THE COLLECTION OF HIS SON ALFRED MORITZ MOND (1868-1930), 1<sup>ST</sup> BARON MELCHETT, MELCHETT COURT, UNITED KINGDOM. PROBABLY SOLD BY SOTHEBY'S LONDON, "CATALOGUE OF THE MELCHETT COLLECTION OF PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS AND ANTIQUITIES", 24 MAY 1951, LOT 26 (?). THEN IN AN ENGLISH PRIVATE COLLECTION. SOLD BY BONHAMS LONDON, "FINE ENGLISH AND CONTINENTAL FURNITURE, WORKS OF ART AND TAPESTRIES", 1 JULY 2003, LOT 15. THEN IN THE COLLECTION OF INTERIOR DESIGNER MARK GILLETTE, UNITED KINGDOM.*

This magnificent marble torso represents the famous Greek hero Hercules. The young man is portrayed in heroic nudity, mid-action, his body describing a rather singular twist. His left leg is folded, the weight of his body resting on his knee, while his right leg is extended backwards. The toes of his left foot are thus resting on the ground.



His hips are twisted to the right, in opposition with his shoulders, making his bust twist and the hero's muscles stand out. Each muscle is exquisitely formed: his abdomen and pectorals are prominent, bisected by a shallow, vertical line leading to a navel sculpted in an extremely lifelike manner. His neck is tense and his collarbones detailed, while his shoulders are contracted. Additionally, their position indicates that his arms were most likely raised. His thighs are bulging and the different muscles that form them can easily be identified, as with his calves. His back was also crafted in a very lifelike way: his shoulder blades are



prominent and his spine emphasised by salient dorsal muscles. This particular position makes all the hero's muscles stand out, giving an impression of tension and extreme effort. Our sculpture is thus a perfect illustration of the care taken by the artists of the time to shape flesh, and their desire to glorify the heroes of mythology by giving them an athletic physique. Glorifying the human body through its muscles also served to showcase the full range of the mastery possessed by the artisan behind the sculpture.

Finally, a tree trunk remains by the right leg, an element generally used as a support to stabilise the sculpture as a whole.



Our torso of Hercules is sculpted from marble with a delicate brown patina and very light traces of concretions, both marks of the passing of time. The marble, a very pure white, has deep red veins that mark Hercules' left leg and ribs on the left side, lending our work a great refinement and, above all, a unique character.



Our superb statue was part of a larger group representing the hero Hercules capturing the Ceryneian hind. As the son of Zeus and one of his mistresses, the mortal Alcmena, he was targeted by the jealous Hera, lawful wife of the king of the gods. To avenge herself, she drove him insane and forced him to kill his wife and two sons. Seeking atonement for his crimes, Hercules went to serve his enemy, King Eurystheus, who entrusted him with the renowned 12 labours. One of his tasks was capturing the Ceryneian hind. According to legend, in Greece, there were five hinds with golden horns and bronze hooves. As they were famed to be strong and swift, the goddess Artemis decided to capture them to hitch them up to her chariot. Only one of them escaped, and, thereafter, became solely dedicated to the goddess. To honour Eurystheus' request and capture the animal without harming it, so as not to draw Artemis' ire, Hercules hunted the hind for an entire year. When the animal was exhausted, he sent an arrow between the bone and tendon of its leg, without spilling so much as

a single drop of blood. He brought the animal to Eurystheus and thus completed his third labour. Our sculpture represented the moment our hero was pinning the animal to the ground with his knee to hold it still and tie it up. The subject, quite frequently depicted, attests to the popularity of mythological subjects among the artists of antiquity, as well as portrayals showcasing athletic bodies. There are, for instance, examples in bronze (ill. 1-2), high-reliefs in marble (ill. 3) and mosaics (ill. 4).



Our sculpture is also extremely precious due to its history, as its provenance can be traced to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Our Hercules is from the collection of the Italian sculptor Giovanni Battista della Porta. Born in 1542, he belonged to the renowned line of the della Portas, Italian sculptors who were active throughout the 16th century. He was the nephew of Tommaso della Porta, who granted him access to the major works of the time such as the Villa d'Este in Tivoli and introduced him to patrons such as the

Farnese and Borghese families. At that time, our sculpture had already been restored. In 1893, H. Graeven thus described it as "*Ercole que amazza doi leoni della medema grandezza*". Our sculpture then depicted Hercules fighting two lions. He was pinning one of them, already dead, beneath his knee while he grasped the mane of the other with his left hand. As Giovanni Battista della Porta was a renowned restorer at that time, it is possible to hypothesise that he was the one who reinterpreted our antique figure.

Our sculpture then joined one of the most prestigious art collections in the world, that of the Borghese family. Acquired in 1609, it was then placed in the Stanza di Diogene in Villa Borghese. It was first mentioned by Giacomo Manilli in 1650, who wrote: "*passata la Porta, si vede un gruppo mezzano d'Ercole, che uccide il Leone Nemeo*". The second mention dates back to 1700, when Domenico Montelatici wrote, in his description of Villa Borghese: "*dall'altra banda continuano due piccoli gruppi antichi di marmo, posti da i lati della terza porta, il primo de quali esprime Hercole, figurati nella Selua Nemea, che piegando un ginocchio sopra un Leone di già morto ne tiene con la sinistra un altro per l'orecchia, e con la destra gli tira un colpo per ucciderlo*". Finally, the sculpture was drawn by the artist Carlo Calderi between 1710 and 1730, which enables us to visualise the group along with the restored part. A study is currently conserved at the British Museum in London, while the final drawing is at Eton College, near Windsor (ill. 5-6).

Our Hercules was then added to the collection of Ludwig Mond (1839-1909) and his wife, Frida. A chemist and industrialist who acquired British nationality later in life, he and Frida were passionate about art in all its forms and had a definite impact on British cultural life as patrons. Their London residence, The Poplars, was a manor richly decorated with antique sculptures, paintings

and furniture, including our work. Also a lover of Italy, at the beginning of the 20th century, he acquired Palazzo Zuccari, near Piazza di Spagna in Rome. The couple passed their passion for art onto their two sons. The elder, Robert, became an Egyptologist and bequeathed more than 250 Egyptian pieces to the British Museum upon his death in 1938. The younger, Alfred, inherited his parents' collection, including our sculpture.



Alfred Moritz Mond (1868-1930) was named 1st Baron Melchett in 1928 and settled at his residence, Melchet Court, in Hampshire in 1911. His collection thus included many antique pieces, both Greek and Roman, which Eugénie Strong inventoried in 1928. She mentioned our statue as number 17, "*Heracles and Two Lions*", and paired its description with a photograph (ill. 7). The collection was ultimately dispersed over several auctions. C. Vermeule and D. von Bothmer thus supposed that our sculpture was sold by Sotheby's London in 1951 as lot

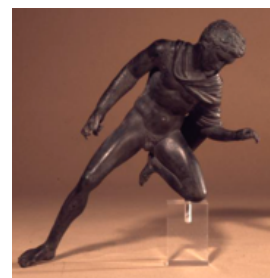
26. It probably joined an English private collection before being sold again at Bonhams in 2003, its restorations completely removed, leaving only the antique part. It was finally acquired by Mark Gillette, a London based interior designer.



#### Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Heracles and the Ceryneian hind, Roman, 1st century AD, bronze. Museo Archeologico Regionale, Palermo, inv. no. 8364.



Ill. 2. Hercules, Roman, 100 BC - AD 1, bronze, H.: 12.7 cm. British Museum, London, inv. no. 1873,0820.5.

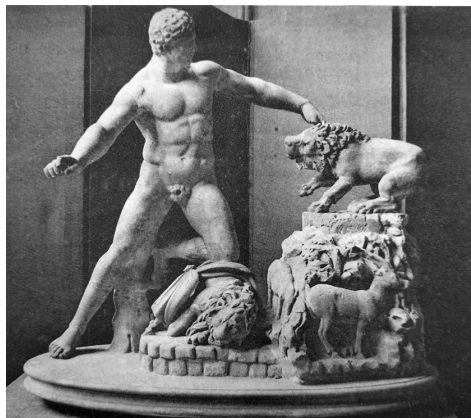


Ill. 3. Hercules and the Ceryneian hind, Roman, 1st century AD, marble, H.: 40 cm. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, inv. no. 044.  
 Ill. 4. Mosaic of Hercules, Roman, AD 170-180, marble and terracotta. Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie, Valence, inv. no. 980.1.1.

**Provenance:**



Ill. 5. Study by Carlo Calderi, 1710-1730. British Museum, London, inv. no. 2013.5015.3.67.  
 Ill. 6. Final drawing by Carlo Calderi, 1710-1730. Eton College, Windsor, inv. no. ECL-Bm.3:23-2012.



Ill. 7. Our restored sculpture in the Melchett collection, 1928.

**Publications:**

- G. Manilli, *Villa Borghese, Fuori di Porta Pinciana* ("Villa Borghese, outside Porta Pinciana"), Italy, 1650, p. 96-97.
- D. Montelatici, *Villa Borghese, Fuori di Porta Pinciana* ("Villa Borghese, outside Porta Pinciana"), Italy, 1700, p. 274.
- Study by Carlo Calderi, 1710-1730, British Museum, London, inv. no. 2013.5015.3.67.
- Final drawing by Carlo Calderi, 1710-1730, Eton College, Windsor, inv. no. ECL-Bm.3:23-2012.
- *Bullettino dell'Imperiale Istituto Archeologico Germanico* ("Bulletin of the Imperial German Archaeological Institute"), Vol. VIII, H. Graeven, *La Raccolta di Antichità di Giovanni Battista della Porta* ("The antiques collection of Giovanni Battista della Porta"), 1893, p. 240, no. 41.
- E. Strong, *Catalogue of the Greek & Roman antiques in the possession of the Right Honourable Lord Melchett*, Oxford, 1928, p. 24, no. 17, pl. 27.
- C. Vermeule and D. von Bothmer, *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 60, *Notes on a New Edition of Michaelis: Ancient Marbles in Great Britain. Part Two*, Chicago, 1956, p. 337-338.
- A. Coliva, *I Borghese e l'antico* ("The Borgheses and the antique"), Milan, 2011, p. 183.