

HERM OF HERAKLES

HELLENISTIC, END OF THE 2ND CENTURY – BEGINNING OF THE 1ST CENTURY BC
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 67 CM.

WIDTH: 27 CM.

DEPTH: 12 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*SOLD BY ARS ANTIQUA, LUZERN,
SWITZERLAND, ON MAY 14TH 1960,
LOT 56.*

*WITH THE ROYAL-ATHENA GALLERIES,
NEW YORK, PUBLISHED IN THEIR
CATALOGUE ARCHAEOLOGY 17 IN 1964.
FORMER AMERICAN COLLECTION OF
JAMES AND MARILYNN ALSDORF,
ILLINOIS, ACQUIRED FROM THE
PREVIOUS OWNER IN 1964.*



This exceptional sculpture is a hermaic pillar representing Heracles, delicately sculpted to the hips and ending in a rectangular base.

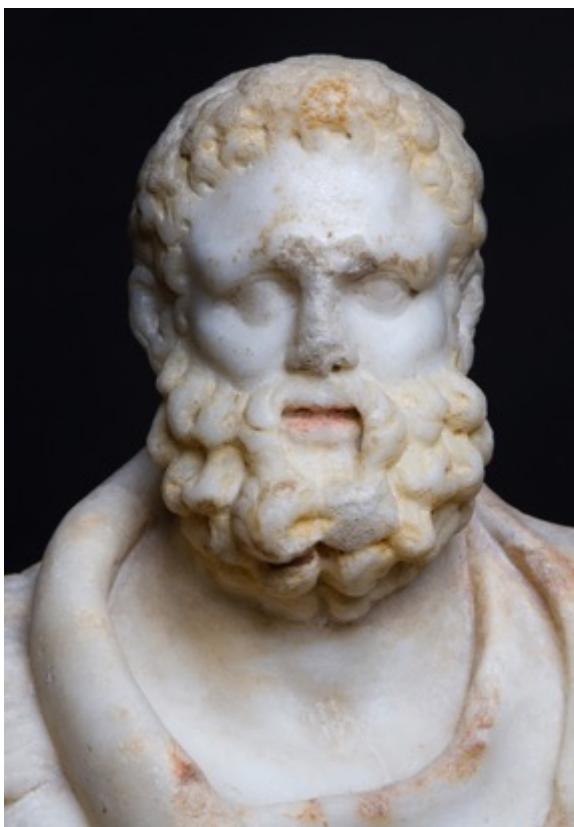


The demigod is represented as a bearded, middle aged man. He has a thin face, made striking by its sunken eyes and high cheekbones. His slightly open mouth still has the original red polychromy, lending our sculpture a unique aura. His hair and exquisitely curled beard are sculpted almost symmetrically and also display a few traces of yellow polychromy, lending the sculpture an air of extreme refinement.

Here, Heracles is represented draped in the skin of the Nemean lion. It is wrapped around his shoulders, the lion's head resting on his right arm. The mane is exquisitely sculpted with prominent curls, while the muzzle rests on our hero's arm. In his right hand, he is holding a section of fur that ends



in one of the animal's paws. His left arm is slightly bent, hand covered by the lion's other front paw. Each part of the feline's pelt is ridged, creating a play of matter and giving the sculpture a very lifelike appearance, attesting to the artist's virtuosity. The Nemean skin is one of Heracles' best known attributes. As the son of Zeus and one of his mistresses, Alceme, Heracles rapidly drew the jealousy of Zeus' wife. Out of vengeance, Hera drove the hero mad, causing him to kill his wife and sons. On the order of Pythia and to atone for his crimes, Heracles began working for his enemy, Eurystheus, who entrusted him with the famous twelve labours. The first of these was to kill the Nemean lion, said to have an impenetrable hide. After strangling the animal, Heracles put on the hide as if it were armour.



The sculpture represented here is a hermaic pillar, an architectural feature serving as a waymarker. The pillars were situated near

borders and crossroads and enabled the Greeks and then the Romans to find their way. As they had an apotropaic function, the pillars were also placed in gymnasiums and palaestras and in front of temples, as was probably the case for our work. Magnificent examples of hermaic pillars representing Heracles draped in the lion skin are currently conserved in Rome and Berlin (Ill. 1-3).



Before finding a place in our collections, our hermaic pillar was put up for sale in Switzerland in 1960 (Ill. 4), then came to the Royal Athena Galleries in New York, featuring in their *Archaeology 17* catalogue in 1964 (Ill. 5). Finally, the sculpture was acquired by James and Marilyn Alsdorf (Ill. 6). Married in 1952, the Alsdorf couple amassed a considerable collection of artworks. Over the years and through their journeys to the four corners of the world, they

acquired masterpieces of Antiquity and European, Asian and contemporary art. Additionally, the couple played an active role in Chicago's cultural life, joining other collectors to found the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.



Ill. 1. Herm representing Heracles, Greek, 4th century BC, marble, H.: 143 cm. Capitoline Museums, Centrale Montemartini, Rome.

Ill. 2. Herm representing Heracles, Roman based on a Greek original, 1st century AD, marble, H.: 124 cm. Capitoline Museums, Room of the Faun, Rome, inv. no. 712.

Ill. 3. Heracles, Greek, marble, H.: 85 cm. Antikensammlung, Berlin, inv. no. 187.

Publications:



Ill. 4. Ars Antiqua, Lucerne, Switzerland, 14/05/1960, lot 56.



Ill. 5. Royal-Athena Galleries, New York, Archaeology 17, 1964.

Ill. 6. Photographs taken by the Royal-Athena Galleries and sent to the Alsdorf couple, 1964.

Comparatives: