

HERMAIC PILLAR REPRESENTING A SATYR

ROMAN, 1ST CENTURY BC – 1ST CENTURY AD
BASANITE

HEIGHT: 60 CM.

WIDTH: 18.5 CM.

DEPTH: 17 CM.

PROVENANCE:
FORMER EUROPEAN COLLECTION SINCE
THE 1950S BASED ON THE BASING AND
RESTORATION TECHNIQUES.
THEN FORMER ENGLISH COLLECTION,
ACQUIRED AT NEWARK ANTIQUES FAIR
IN 2019.



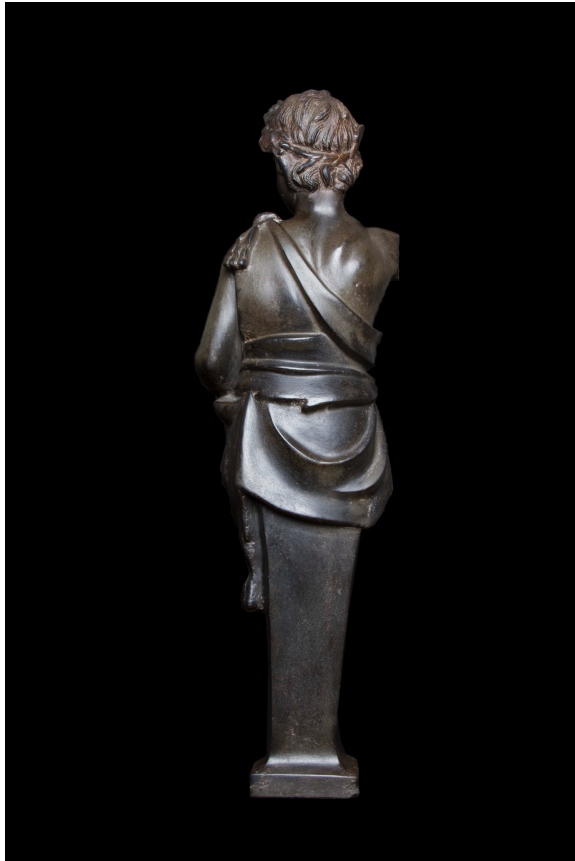
This magnificent basalt statue depicts a young Satyr standing in a hieratic position, draped in an animal skin. The lower part of his body forms a sheath that tapers as it descends.



Our deity is depicted with youthful features: his thin face with round cheeks is marked by high cheekbones, the straight, pointed nose surmounts a small, half-open mouth with thin lips, the chin is slightly turned up and large, deep-set eyes animate his gaze. His hair, messily arranged, is made up of large curly locks going in different directions, themselves decorated with fine incised lines, giving the whole a great dynamism and reinforcing the youthful, spirited aspect typical of young satyrs. He wears a crown of grape leaves on his head, with delicate heart-shaped leaves and small bunches of fruit



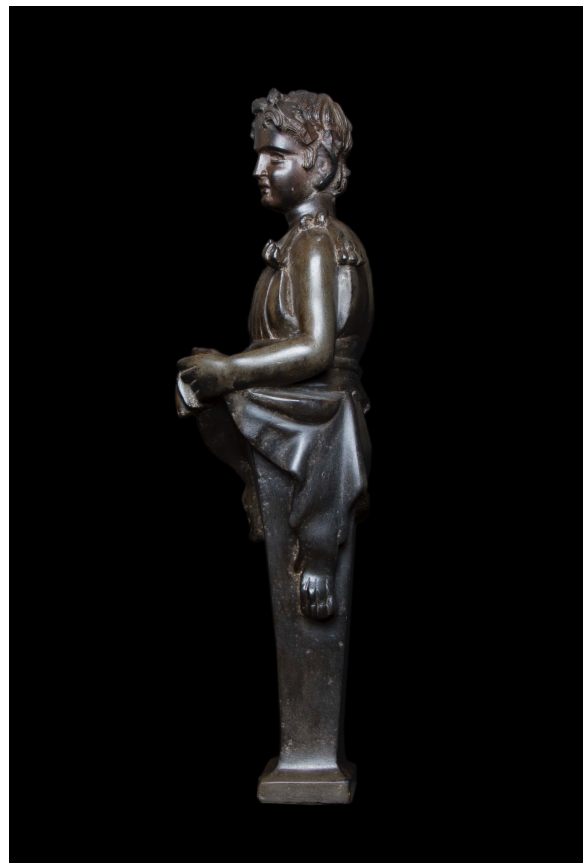
enlivening his hairstyle, tied at the back of his head. The ears, left completely uncovered, are large and pointed, while two small horns appear on the upper part of the forehead, two elements that confirm the mythological nature of our creature.



The slender neck, with its delicately defined muscles, leads to broad, partly bare shoulders. The chest is also partially uncovered, the right pectoral left visible while the left is gracefully covered by a panther skin. The garment, typical of representations of satyrs and other Dionysian creatures, is wrapped around his waist, tied over his left shoulder and held in his left hand. The different layers are perfectly detailed, with a tighter section arching over our satyr, creating delicate pleats on the fuller sections that fall down over his hips. The panther's head is partially visible on our satyr's abdomen, with an ear, eye and lips subtly detached. All the artist's dexterity is visible here, as he has succeeded perfectly in giving us the impression that the

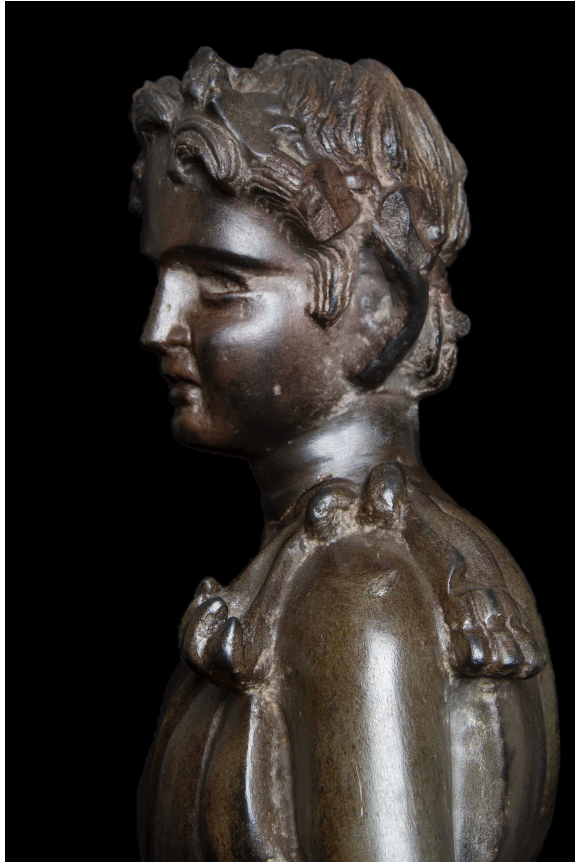
animal's skin is a light fabric, hugging the body and with each layer detached, one covering part of the panther's head, for example. Two of the animal's paws are tied together on the left shoulder, while a second paw falls down the left hip.

The rest of the body of our young satyr ends in a smooth rectangular sheath, contrasting with the highly worked and detailed appearance of the upper part.



This very particular form links our work to the corpus of hermaic pillars, architectural elements that were originally used as milestones near borders and crossroads, to help the Greeks and later the Romans find their way. For the Greeks, the primary function of the hermaic pillar was religious: passers-by would place offerings at their feet and hang wreaths of flowers from the two tenons that can still sometimes be seen on the sides of the pillar. With the Romans, these sculptures became collectors' items and took on a mainly decorative meaning, taking over public squares, the private gardens of villas

and even sanctuaries. In this domestic context, these pillars could depict all manner of divinities, heroes or other important figures.



The particularity of our sculpture lies not only in the finesse of its execution, but also in the material used: basanite. This extraordinarily hard magmatic rock comes from the eastern Egyptian desert and was quite popular first with the Egyptians, then in the Roman Empire. Its particular deep black colour with brown highlights made it popular with sculptors and patrons alike, as it was reminiscent of the famous bronzes of the Classical period, of which every influential person of the time wanted a copy or a similar specimen. This influence can be seen, for example, in the three Herms in *nero antico* marble in the Museo Nazionale Romano (ill. 1). These three sculptures are modelled on the Dancers of Herculaneum, a group of five bronze sculptures dating from the Hellenistic period. Moreover, its hardness and rarity make it an exceptional

material, used only for prestigious commissions. The quality of the workmanship and all the details that adorn our satyr indicate that this piece was probably commissioned by a wealthy Roman citizen, as is the case with a sculpture of a river god, also made from basanite (ill. 2).

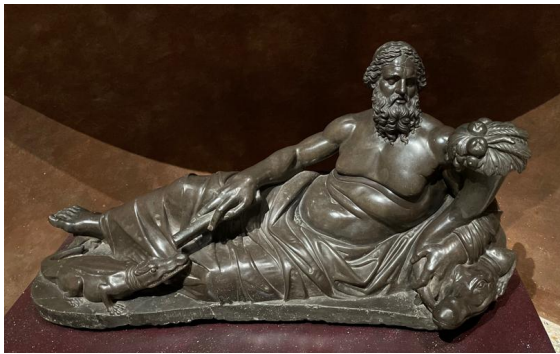
Although this material is used to imitate bronze, some examples are actually made from this precious metal, as in the case of a hermaphrodite pillar representing a Satyr, preserved in England (Fig. 3). It bears clear similarities to our herm of Satyr.



Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Three feminine hermaic pillars, Roman, Julio-Claudian, AD 38-54, *nero antico* marble. Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. nos. 1056, 1048, 1058.



Ill. 2. Personification of the Nile river, Roman, 1st-2nd century AD, basanite. Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome.



Ill. 3. Hermaic pillar representing a young Satyr, Roman, 1st century AD, bronze, H. 58.5 cm. Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire, England.