

KORÉ

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

HEIGHT: 37 CM.

WIDTH: 21 CM.

DEPTH: 11 CM.

PROVENANCE:
ON THE SWISS ART MARKET
SINCE THE LATE 1960S.
SOLD BY SOTHEBY'S LONDON,
"EGYPTIAN, WESTERN ASIATIC, GREEK,
ETRUSCAN AND ROMAN ANTIQUITIES",
1 JULY 1969, LOT 119.
THEN IN AN ENGLISH PRIVATE
COLLECTION.
PRIVATE COLLECTION OF HELMUT
GERNSHEIM (1913-1995), LONDON
AND LUGANO.
SOLD BY FISCHER AUCTIONS, LUCERNE,
12 JUNE 2013, LOT 4, 081.
THEN IN THE COLLECTION OF
DR SYLVIA LEGRAIN-GERSCHWYLER
(1936-2022), WABERN, SWITZERLAND.



This elegant marble sculpture represents a standing feminine figure, sculpted from the

front. All the complexity of the work resides in the drapery clothing our young woman, known as a peplos. This mantle, made of a rectangular piece of wool pinned at the shoulders and belted, lies over a lighter tunic called a chiton. The round neckline leaves the nape of her neck uncovered, while a thicker trim delimits the peplos, which is itself made up of two layers. The first covers her chest, then separates on either side of her hips, falling vertically at the back.

A belt, which marks the waist of our young woman, is visible over her lower abdomen, revealing a second layer that subtly covers her legs. Over the central part of her torso, a multitude of horizontal and U-shaped folds are deeply carved and discreetly hint at the small chest of our young woman. Other graduated, vertical folds fall to cover her hips on either side. Each hollow formed within those folds was individually sculpted, creating a superposition of material that looks very realistic.

The second layer of fabric covering her legs is more plainly sculpted. A deep central fold is framed by simply carved vertical lines, showing the different thicknesses of fabric. Her legs are thus subtly visible beneath the drapery, her right leg slightly bent in such a way that her knee delicately stands out. Her extended left leg is covered with diagonal folds. Originally, our young woman was grabbing a piece of fabric in her left hand,



pulling the fabric away from her leg in a movement that the artist was able to recreate in the stone in a spectacular fashion. Her right arm, fragmentary from the elbow, was initially held horizontally, and her hand probably held an offering. The sleeves are secured by pins that are still visible on the upper parts of her arms. Here, too, the artist magnificently recreated the impression of material, as the fabric looks tightened over the arms and features a series of delicately carved folds.



The back of our sculpture is a little less detailed. The different layers of the peplos overlay each other and the delicate folds of the drapery are more discreetly represented. Finally, in the upper part, there is still a lock of hair that lies along her nape.

All the elegance of our young woman is thus encapsulated in the detail of the drapery, as well as in the gorgeous patina coloring our marble. The few traces of concretions that are still visible and the soft brown hues of the

stone show the effects of time on the material and give our work a unique aura.

From an iconographic standpoint, our feminine figure is a kore. Meaning “young girl” in Greek, the korai were originally Greek sculptures from the Archaic period that appeared in around the 7th to the 5th century BC. Generally used as votive objects placed in sanctuaries or marking the location of tombs, korai were always represented standing, legs close together, wearing a peplos or himation that completely hid their bodies and gave them a very stylised appearance. There is a truly lovely example dating from the 5th century BC conserved in Los Angeles (ill. 1). Their masculine counterparts are the kourai, young men represented in a hieratic position, arms held along their sides and one leg forward.



This sculptural typology, initially very stylized and then increasingly naturalistic, thrived in that period, showing the evolution of sculptors' technical mastery and the tastes of the patrons.



This style of representation then endured until the Roman era, with the emergence, from the 1st century BC, of many 'archaistic' works that adopted the codes of Greek statuary, including the korai. Our sculpture is a perfect example of that blend of styles: the posture, the very stylized appearance and the body that is practically invisible beneath the drapery all tie our young woman to the art of the Archaic period. However, the style of Roman artists can be seen in the sculpture of the drapery, characteristic of works from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD. The closest examples to our sculpture are two sculptures conserved in Copenhagen and Tripoli (ill. 2-3). More broadly speaking, in that period, various statues depicting women in peplos were sculpted, with more or less elaborate draperies, again copying Archaic Greek models, as exemplified by two gorgeous sculptures, one from the Hellenistic period and the other Roman, conserved in Baltimore and Los Angeles (ill. 4-5). Our sculpture thus perfectly

exemplifies Roman artists' reinterpretation of Archaic art.

The provenance of our kore can be traced to the end of the 1960s, when it was sold by Sotheby's (ill. 6). It then joined an English private collection and was ultimately acquired by the photographer Helmut Gernsheim (1913-1995). An art historian and great collector, he was notably famous for having discovered the oldest existing photograph. Born in Germany, he lived his life between the United Kingdom and Switzerland. As a true art enthusiast, his collection was made up of photographs, African art and some ancient sculptures, including our kore (ill. 7). It was sold in 2013, before finally ending up in the collection of Dr Sylvia Legrain Gerschwyler (1936-2022). The neurosurgeon and her husband, who both had a passion for art, collected many miniatures, books of hours and paintings, as well as carefully selected ancient works.



Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Kore (The Elgin Kore), Greek, circa 475 BC, marble, H.: 71 cm. Getty Villa Museum, Los Angeles, inv. no. 70.AA.114.

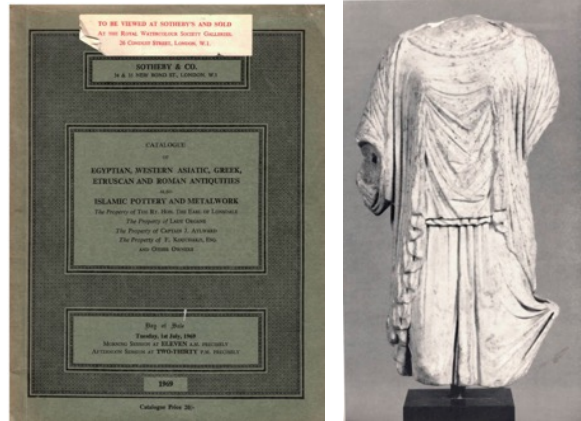
Ill. 2. Statuette of a Kore, Roman, 1st century AD, marble, H.: 64.5 cm. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, inv. no. 443.

Ill. 3. Kore, Roman, 1st century BC – 1st century AD, marble, H.: 45 cm. From Leptis Magna, Libya, National Museum, Tripoli.



Ill. 4. Woman "Peplophoros", Greek, 1st century BC, marble, H.: 123 cm. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, inv. no. 23.87.

Ill. 5. Peplophoros, Roman, 25 BC – AD 125, black stone, H.: 93.5 cm. Getty Villa Museum, Los Angeles, inv. no. 73.AA.4.



Ill. 6. Sotheby's London, 1 July 1969, lot 119.



Ill. 7. Helmut Gernsheim (1913-1995), Lugano, 1986.