

GRAVE STELE REPRESENTING A NUDE YOUNG MAN

ATTICA, GREECE, 4TH CENTURY BC
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 125 CM.

WIDTH: 52 CM.

DEPTH: 16 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*IN THE PRIVATE COLLECTION OF PEPYS
COCKERELL, ESQ., LONDON.*

*THEN IN THE BRUMMER GALLERY
COLLECTION, PARIS AND NEW YORK,
ACQUIRED FROM THE FORMER IN 1926.*

*TRANSMITTED TO ELLA BACHÉ
BRUMMER IN 1964.*

*SOLD AT AUCTION BY THE KOLLER
GALLERY AND SPINK & SON, "THE
ERNEST BRUMMER COLLECTION, PART
II", 16-19 OCTOBER 1979, LOT 618.*

*ACQUIRED BY THE MERRIN GALLERY AT
THE ABOVE MENTIONED SALE.*

*IN A PRIVATE COLLECTION FROM JUNE
1981.*

This marble grave stele with an Attic pediment displays a static narrative scene in which a young man takes up most of the space, standing on what seems to be uneven ground. While the rough ground suggests that the scene is set outside, the background is void of clues on the environmental context, making the central figure the sole focus.

The young man is presented completely nude. His round, youthful face charms the beholder, particularly through his gaze, which seems fixated on what is in front of him. Thin eyelids form hoods over his eyes, lending them extra depth, and his eyebrows, which are barely visible on the boy's small forehead, follow their curves. Judging by his harmonious features, his nose would, in all

likelihood, have been short and straight, as indicated by its sides, which flow from the lines of his brows. His full, sealed lips form a subtle smile, which is accentuated by the boy's full cheeks, giving him a reserved expression. His luminous face is framed by long hair, which is coiled in curls and big, loose ringlets that become tighter along the lengths. His hair is held back by a band and falls down his back, which is that of an epeheus. His youth is particularly evident in the treatment given to his anatomy.



His shoulders, although bulging with muscles, are narrow and his torso, rhythmical



by the relief of his abdominals and pectorals, is that of a young man. He is leaning on his right leg, right foot set flat on the ground, while his left leg is flexed, casting his waist in high relief. Only the toes and part of the sole of his left foot are touching the ground. By the weighting and chiasmus of the body, the sculptural type this stele belongs to is that of Polykleitos. Although the young man is entirely nude, in his right hand, he is holding a bird with folded wings, perhaps a dove, while his left hand once held an attribute that is now fragmentary. The bird seems to be drawing the interest of a dog, who is sitting calmly on its hind legs, muzzle and mouth pointed towards it. The dog's lowered ears and two raised forelegs evoke a certain domesticity and docility.



The marble used for this sculpture came from Mount Pentelicus, a quarry located to the north-east of Athens and massively exploited during antiquity. The marble was particularly prized for its purity and the fineness of its grain, which enabled sculptors to shape details with extreme accuracy. Naturally a dazzling white, it was a choice material for both Attic grave stelai and the grand monuments of the classical period

such as those of the Acropolis. Over time, due to climatic conditions, Pentelic marble develops a characteristic, slightly golden patina, which softens the surface of the marble and imbues works with a particular visual warmth. On this sculpture, that transformation is obvious: the patina has taken on ochre hues, more intensely visible on the boy's right pectoral and on the pediment, a testament to both the age of the work and its prolonged exposure to the elements.



The iconography of this young man with a dog and a bird dates back to the 4th century BC. The trivial, almost everyday scene is typical of funerary representations of children and young adults. Originally, however, such iconography concerned older deceased men, wearing beards and holding staffs, who were playing with their dogs, frequently catching their attention with insects rather than birds (ill. 1). Although it could also be featured on ceramics and votive reliefs, the game between a dog and a young boy was most often represented on grave stelai. The playful scene and attributes that could accompany the action are codes signifying the youth of the person

represented and the insouciance and delicacy that precede adulthood. Those representations, which were most frequently of young boys, although they sometimes featured young girls (ill. 4), necessarily included a dog and a bird. The other attributes, however, could vary from stele to stele. Thus, while the youngest deceased children hold dolls (ill. 4), those closest to adulthood seem to bear more virile attributes such as aryballois or strigils (ill. 2). The attribute once held in the young man's left hand would have told us more about his identity, or at least his age when he died.



However, his heroic nudity, admittedly appropriate for the dead, could also be that of a boy old enough to frequent the gymnasium. He could also, hypothetically, have been holding an aryballois or a strigil in his fragmentary hand, like the athlete depicted on a stele preserved at the Louvre (ill. 3). This Attic grave stele is in line with a morphology that reached its height in the 4th century BC, forming, with its pediment surmounted by three acroteria, a kind of *naiskos*. Previously, grave stelai were framed only by a crown-shaped moulding bearing the name of the deceased. The morphology,

style and workmanship of this stele thus date it to the 4th century BC, similarly to the Rhodian grave stele (ill. 2) that it closely resembles.

This relief is most likely from the collection of the architect, archaeologist and collector Charles Robert Cockerell (1788–1863), who undertook a grand study tour around the Mediterranean at the beginning of the 19th century. He distinguished himself through his contributions to identifying the temples of Apollo in Bassae and Aphaia in Aegina. The fragments of the frieze of the former are currently at the British Museum, while most of the architectural decoration of the latter is preserved at the Glyptothek in Munich. Between 1810 and 1817, together with a scientific team, he travelled through continental Greece, the Greek islands and Asia Minor and it is very likely that he returned with artworks for his private collection. Several works from Greece, undoubtedly part of that collection, were mentioned in the catalogue for the Burlington Fine Arts Club's exhibition of ancient Greek art, held in London in 1904. They had been lent by a Mrs Frederick Pepys Cockerell, probably the widow of Charles Robert Cockerell's son. In March 1926 (ill. 5), the Brummer Gallery bought the Attic grave stele from a Cockerell family member, probably Charles Robert Cockerell's grandson, Lieutenant Colonel Frederick William Pepys Cockerell (1876–1932), as per Volume II of the sales catalogue for the auction of the Ernest Brummer collection (Ill. 6). The Brummer Gallery, which specialised in ancient sculpture, Mediterranean antiques and mediaeval art, was one of the most prestigious art galleries of the 20th century. Founded in Paris by Joseph Brummer (1883–1947) and his brothers Imre and Ernest in 1905, it opened a branch in New York a little before the First World War. The gallery distinguished itself by its meticulous acquisitions policy, based mostly on private

ownership, and prestigious clientele, which included the Metropolitan Museum of Art, John D. Rockefeller and Henry Walters. The stele was then put up for sale in New York in 1949, though, at that time, it was not sold (Ill. 7). Following the death of Ernest Brummer in 1964, his collection, which included the Attic grave stele, passed to his wife, Ella Baché Brummer, before being sold at auction in Zurich via the Koller Gallery and Spink & Son in 1979. On that occasion, the Merrin Gallery in New York, founded by Edward Merrin in 1963 and specialising in antiquities, acquired it before parting with it in 1981. Then, our stele entered a private collection in which it remained until 2025.

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Plaster cast of the grave stele of Alxenor of Naxos, Boeotia, 490 BC, marble, National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

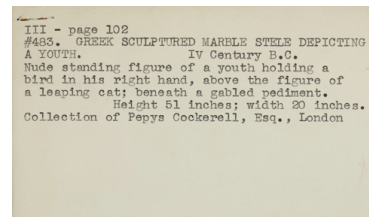
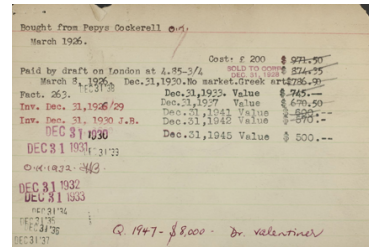
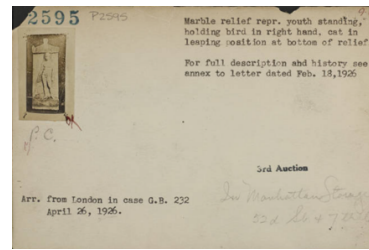
Ill. 2. Grave stele, Rhodes, 400–350 BC, Pentelic marble, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. Ma 807.



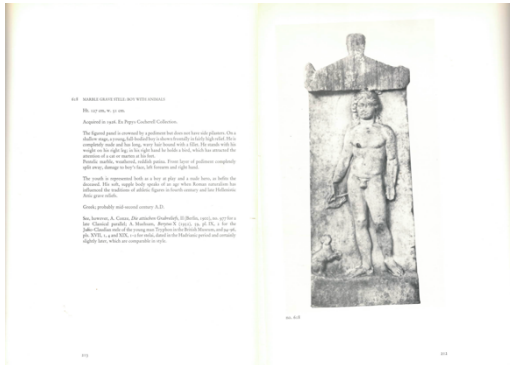
Ill. 3. Grave stele of an athlete, Athens, 360–350 BC, marble, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. Ma 3114.

Ill. 4. Grave stele of a young girl, “Melisto”, Attic, 350–320 BC, marble, Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, inv. no. 1961.86.

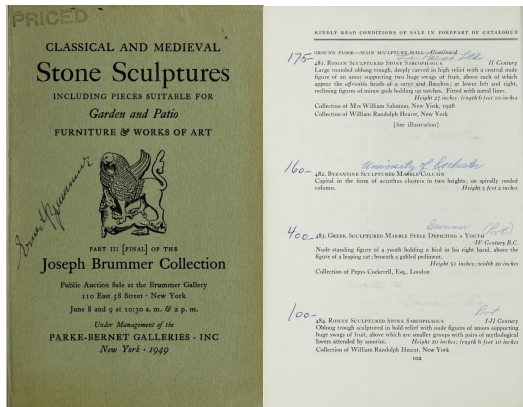
Provenance:



Ill. 5. Brummer Gallery inventory sheet, March 1926 – inv. no. P2595, The Brummer Gallery Records, digital archives given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (NY) in 2016.



III. 6. Volume II of the sales catalogue for the auction of the Ernest Brummer collection, held at the Dolder Grand (hotel) in Zurich on 16-19 October 1979, p. 212.



III. 7. Parke-Bernet Galleries, *Classical and medieval stone sculptures. Part III of the Art Collection Belonging to the Estate of the late Joseph Brummer*, 8-9 June 1949, no. 483.