

PEPLOPHOROS KORE

ROMAN, CIRCA 2ND CENTURY AD
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 110 CM.

WIDTH: 38 CM.

DEPTH: 25,5 CM.

PROVENANCE:
IN A EUROPEAN PRIVATE COLLECTION
FROM THE 17TH OR 18TH CENTURY,
JUDGING BY THE RESTORATION
TECHNIQUES.
THEN IN AN ENGLISH PRIVATE
COLLECTION, CEYLON HOUSE, 10 ST
ANDREWS ROAD, BEDFORD,
BEDFORDSHIRE. THE SCULPTURE WAS
ON DISPLAY IN THE GARDEN BEFORE
1955.
PASSED DOWN BY SUCCESSION UNTIL
THE END OF 2024.



This elegant statue represents an idealised female figure belonging to the iconographic type of the *kore*, a Greek term meaning “young girl”. She is depicted standing, from a frontal perspective, her bearing elegant. Her shoulders, straight and symmetrical, accentuate the hieratic impression made by

the figure, although it is offset by the position of her legs. Her right leg is straight and bears the weight of her body, while the left is bent and slightly out to the side, giving the statue a very slight impression of movement.



The figure is wearing a *peplos*, a traditional female garment made of wool and widely worn in Greece between the archaic period and the 5th century BC. It was made up of a large piece of rectangular fabric, folded vertically and fastened at the shoulders with clasps (*fibulae*), which can be seen here. The fabric forms a long, cylindrical dress that falls to the feet, while the upper part is folded outwards along the upper edge, creating a large overfold called *apoptygma*, visible over the chest. A belt cinched around the waist shapes the silhouette and causes a slight bulge of fabric in the upper part. The treatment of the bust particularly emphasises



the concentric folds of the drapery, which clings to the figure's chest without ever explicitly highlighting her anatomy. That reserve in the representation of the female body is typical of *korai*, for whom modesty and dignity were fundamental qualities.



Her arms, now largely fragmentary, were originally covered by the drapery and held along her sides. Her left arm, preserved to the elbow, still has fabric motifs, with mandorla-shaped openings all the way down. This garment, probably a *chiton*, a long tunic, formed the innermost layer of clothing and was generally made of a light, refined fabric. The position of the left arm indicates, however, that one or even both forearms were extended outwards. This is common in representations of *korai*, often depicted as bearers of offerings and holding a fruit, flower or ritual object for the deity. One of the most remarkable aspects of this sculpture is the treatment of the drapery, which is ornately sculpted. On either side of the body, the panels of the garment fall in wide lengths of fabric, arranged in cascades of deeply carved, fluted folds. On the right side of our *kore*, there is a clasp attaching the fabric, thus creating different levels of falling folds, all

sculpted in a very lifelike manner. On her other side, a single length of fabric, fastened at her shoulder, goes down her back and up at her side, forming an opening for her arm. These superposed layers of fabric create a subtle play of light and shadow, lending the sculpture a strong material presence. The lower part of the *peplos* exhibits a different type of fold. Long, vertical and practically tubular, these folds follow the movement of the left leg, to which they cling perfectly. The fabric falls to her feet, completely covering her right foot, while the toes of her left foot emerge from the drapery. That detail accentuates the illusion of movement.



Although the back of the sculpture is less elaborate than the front, it was still carefully sculpted, revealing the aesthetic and technical intentions of the sculptor. That hierarchical treatment is typical of ancient sculpture: the front exhibits the most sophisticated aesthetic aspects, while the back is plainer. Unlike some ancient works for which the back is barely etched, that of this statue is complete, indicating that it was made to be viewed from several angles, or at least placed in an open space. The *peplos* covers the figure's back entirely, forming a

large, continuous surface that is animated by ample, regular, vertical folds. These descend almost uninterruptedly from her shoulder blades to her feet, giving a strong impression of verticality and stability. The folds are less deeply carved than on the front, but their regular, parallel aspect contributes to the silhouette's hieratic appearance, characteristic of the *peplophoros* (literally, *peplos*-wearing figure). In the upper part, the fabric falls from the shoulders in large, slightly rounded folds, showing the thickness of the woollen garment. The overfold of the *peplos*, which is visible at the back, is marked by a slightly curved horizontal line, separating the upper part from the skirt. That boundary line is subtly treated: the sculptor softened the transition between both areas through a slight overlap of fabric, avoiding an excessively stark break.



On either side, the panels of fabric fall more thickly, suggesting lateral overfolds. In the lower part of the back, the folds become narrower, tubular and deeply incised, reflecting those on the front. Their arrangement also follows the slight movement of the left leg, which is perceptible from the back by a discreet asymmetry in the

rhythm of the folds. That subtle differentiation breaks the strict symmetry and contributes to the illusion of a body that is moving under the drapery. There is also a slightly hollowed-out rectangular shape over her buttocks, probably linked to a modern intervention carried out to attach the sculpture to a wall. This technical detail is a precious clue as to its material history and the way it was displayed in the 17th or 18th century.



Korai make up one of the main types of archaic and classical Greek statuary, developed in the 7th century BC and widely disseminated until the 5th century BC. They are generally interpreted as votive figures offered to deities or as grave markers. Their symbolic function prevails over any individualisation: they embody the values of youth, beauty, modesty and piety. The stereotyped figure is depicted standing, distinctly frontal, following a rigorous and balanced composition. The shoulders, perfectly horizontal and symmetrical, reinforce the statue's hieratic aspect. That impression is, however, tempered by the position of the legs: the straight right leg bears the weight of the body while the left leg is bent and slightly out to the side. That

discreet tilt of the hips introduces a slight dynamism to her posture that breaks the strict archaic rigidity, heralding the pursuit of balance and a more natural posture that characterised classical sculpture.



While the iconographic type of the *kore* is Greek in origin, this work ties in with archaistic Roman sculpture. From the end of the Republic and during the first centuries of the Empire, Roman artists showed a distinct taste for reprising and reinterpreting ancient Greek models. Those sculptures, known as “archaistic”, are not mere copies: they associate the formal schemes inherited from archaic Greek art – frontality, apparent immobility and concealed anatomy – with a more supple, complex and ornamental treatment of the drapery typical of imperial Roman sculpture. Our *kore* is perfectly aligned with that movement. Although we do not know of any perfectly identical Roman examples, the horizontal edge of the overfold and the arrangement of the folds around the bent leg suggest a Greek original dating to the middle of the 5th century BC, similar to two sculptures of Demeter, of the Boboli type (ill. 1 and 2). It is especially comparable to the type known as *peplophoros*, attested

by several similar examples preserved in Oxford (ill. 3), at the Galleria Borghese in Rome (ill. 4), at the National Roman Museum (ill. 5) and in the Vatican (ill. 6). These works attest to the wide dissemination and lasting success of the model in Roman workshops, particularly between the Julio-Claudian period and Hadrian’s time. By its subtle blend of archaic rigour and formal refinement, this sculpture perfectly illustrates the way in which Roman artists were able to take up the forms of ancient Greek art, not only as a homage, but also as a reinvented plastic language, adapted to the tastes and expectations of their time.

Originally, *korai* and *peplophoroi* were essentially relegated to cult spaces: they were intended for sanctuaries and temples, where they had a votive or honorific function directly linked to divine worship. Later, in the Roman world, particularly towards the end of the Republic and then during the Empire, they progressively exited the sole religious context to also enter the private sphere. The Roman elites appropriated these statuary types, using them to adorn their villas, gardens and peristyles – similarly to Hadrian’s Villa in Tivoli (Ill. 7), where many archaistic sculptures attest to that distinct taste for ancient Greek art. It thus features *korai* in the form of caryatids. While the *kore* typology was essentially preserved, it underwent formal and contextual adaptations. The symbolic weight of the divine figure remained, but was transposed into private settings, where it became a vector of cultural prestige, scholarly piety and admiration for Greek antiquity. The phenomenon was part of a veritable “cult of antiquity”, particularly dear to the Romans, and truly had its heyday during the reign of Hadrian, the quintessential philhellenic emperor. In that regard, our statue is a remarkable example of that archaistic production, accurately illustrating the

balance between loyalty to ancient canons and Roman sensibilities.

Our superb *kore* is carved from an elegant, fine-grained, homogeneous white marble, allowing for a precise, nuanced treatment of the surface. The grey veins that are naturally present in the marble were accounted for by the sculptor and integrated into the composition. The delicate bronze patina that now covers the statue is the result of a slow, natural alteration, a testament to the effect of time on our spectacular *kore*. That patina softens the transitions between the folds and attenuates the sharp edges, creating a wonderful visual softness. From a technical standpoint, the sculpture attests to a remarkable mastery of marble carving and confirms that it was very carefully produced, most likely by a Roman workshop that fully mastered Greek models and their plastic codes.

The old restorations – now removed – as well as the mortice on the back of our *kore* tell us that it was part of a European private collection in the 17th or 18th century, as that period was marked by a pronounced interest in ancient art and the constitution of ancient sculpture cabinets and galleries. The sculpture then joined an English private collection and was preserved at Ceylon House, 10 St Andrews Road, Bedford, Bedfordshire, where it was displayed in the garden. The property, which belonged to Annie Francis, widow of Clifford R. Francis, was sold with the sculptures in the garden in 1955, then remained in the same family until 2024, passed down by succession.

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Statue of Demeter, Boboli type, Roman, 2nd century AD after a Greek original from the 5th–4th century BC, marble. Boboli Gardens, Florence.

Ill. 2. Statue of Demeter, Boboli type, Roman, 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 248 cm. National Archaeological Museum, Florence.



Ill. 3. Statue of woman wearing peplos (Peplophoros), Roman, 2nd century AD after a Greek original dated to 470–460 BC, marble, H.: 163 cm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. no. AN1917.66.

Ill. 4. Peplophoros, Roman, 1st century AD, marble, H.: 172 cm. Galleria Borghese, Rome, inv. no. CCXVI.



Ill. 5. Pepliphoros, Roman, 2nd century AD after a Greek original from *ca* 470-460 BC, marble, H.: 156 cm. Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Rome, inv. no. 8577.

Ill. 6. Headless statuette of a pepliphoros, Roman, 2nd century AD, marble. Vatican Museums, inv. no. MV.3225.o.o.



Ill. 7. Caryatids at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli.