

HEAD OF EROS

ROMAN, CIRCA 1ST-2ND CENTURY AD
MARBLE

HAUTEUR : 17 CM.

LARGEUR : 17 CM.

PROFONDEUR : 18 CM.

*PROVENANCE :
FORMER PRIVATE COLLECTION OF A
FAMILY FROM THE AUVERGNE-RHÔNE-
ALPES REGION.*



This gentle, youthful face represents Eros, god of love and creative power in Greek mythology. Captured in a subtle movement, the young god's face is slightly tilted to the right. The softness of his features is accentuated by the roundness of the cheeks, jaw, and chin, which lends the whole a particularly youthful physiognomy. The hair, preserved mainly at the sides and back of the skull, plays a full part in the dynamic of the head. The locks unfurl in supple curls, some rendered as fine spirals at the temples, others thicker and more deeply carved at the back of the skull. Their arrangement follows the contours of the head while introducing a play

of directions that animates the sculpted surface. The treatment of the curls, alternating raised locks with more deeply incised furrows, gives the hair great plasticity and an impression of lightness. These locks flow fluidly with the tilt of the face and so contribute to the impression of movement that animates the sculpture as a whole. The ears, for their part, remain clearly visible and are rendered with a certain concern for naturalism, particularly noticeable in the subtle modelling of the raised and recessed areas. The treatment of the eyes is likewise striking: their almost spherical volume contrasts with the almond-shaped outline formed by the eyelids, which helps soften the gaze. Particular attention is paid to the canthi — the corners of the eyelids — finely defined in very low relief. The mouth, slightly parted, seems to sketch a smile. This subtle opening of the lips introduces a form of expression to the face and contributes to the illusion of life that the sculpture conveys. Eros thus does not appear as a fixed, impassive figure: the tilt of the head, the treatment of the features, and the movement of the hair instead combine to give him genuine animation. The sculpture thus seems to capture the young god in a fleeting instant.

At the top of the skull, a mortise hole, now filled in, most likely attests to an assembly or fixing device. Despite the alterations and restorations, much of the original polish appears to have been preserved. Light thus reflects gently off the surface of the marble, whose relatively coarse grain produces slight shimmering effects and a subtle translucency. The material also displays a homogeneous brown patina, which attests to the age of the



work while lending its surface a warm tone and a certain aesthetic depth.



Eros personifies amorous desire. Several traditions exist concerning his birth. According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, Eros was a primordial deity born from the original Chaos, and thus has no ancestors, becoming instead a source of life itself. Conversely, in Plato's *Symposium*, Eros is said to have been born of the union of Poros, god of resourcefulness, and Penia, the personification of poverty. Eros thus becomes the philosophical embodiment of desire: a being forever in a state of want, like his mother, yet one who uses every resource at his disposal to attain his desire, in the manner of his father. With his bow and arrows, Eros spreads love wherever he goes. For the Romans, Eros takes the name Cupid, retaining the same attributes and functions. His image enjoyed great popularity in private and public decor, through mosaics (ill. 1) as well as sculpture in the round.

This head of Eros can be dated to the 1st–2nd centuries AD. It belongs to the broader context of the Roman fascination with Greek culture and artistic production, a trend that became especially pronounced following the progressive conquest of the Hellenistic world. Greek art, regarded as a model of refinement and beauty, exerted considerable influence on Roman artistic production. Greek statuary in particular was the subject of numerous copies and adaptations intended to adorn public and private spaces. In Roman buildings, architectural niches frequently housed sculptures inspired by Greek models, adapted to the tastes and decorative requirements of Roman society. This head of Eros appears to belong to this broader phenomenon of the reception and diffusion of Greek sculptural models throughout the Roman world.



The fragmentary face preserved today most likely belonged to a larger statuary composition depicting Eros stringing his bow. This iconographic type is thought to derive from a bronze original attributed to the sculptor Lysippos, created in the third

quarter of the 4th century BC for the sanctuary of Eros at Thespieae, in Boeotia. As the Greek original has not survived, it is known to us chiefly through several Roman marble replicas and adaptations, among which are notably those preserved at the Capitoline Museums in Rome (ill. 2) and the Louvre Museum in Paris (ill. 3).



In this statuary type, Eros is shown in a strongly dynamic pose: the young god extends his arms to the right as he prepares to draw his bow. The effort required for this action produces a slight torsion of the torso and creates a spiralling movement that extends into the position of the head, which naturally follows the tilt of the body, turning toward the right. It therefore seems plausible to assume that the head under study could belong to this statuary type.

Comparatives :



Ill. 1. Psyché et Éros, Romain, IIIe siècle ap. J.-C., mosaïque provenant de la maison dite du Concours de boisson à Samandağ, Turquie, Musée d'Antakya.



Ill. 2. Statue d'Éros bandant son arc, Romain, IIe siècle ap. J.-C., d'après un original en bronze de Lysippe, 3e quart du IVe siècle av. J.-C., marbre, H. : 123 cm, Rome, Musées du Capitole.



Ill. 3. Statue of Eros drawing his bow, Roman, after a bronze original by Lysippos, 3rd quarter of the 4th century BC, marble, H.: 122 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre.