

## GREEK BRONZE STATUETTE OF A LION

Greek, End of 5th Century B.C. - early 4th Century B.C.

Bronze

Height: 8 cm, length: 11.80 cm

Reference: 18726



This lion was certainly made as part of a small group of no less than two, probably three figures. The lower part of the three paws and the tail are lost, but the rest of the statuette is complete. The deep brown surface of the metal is in an excellent state of preservation and highlights the remarkable artistic quality of the work: this lion is graced with modeling that is full of nuance and is precisely and minutely cold worked to create an animal that is bursting with vitality and realism.

Our lion is frozen in a crucial moment of the hunt, where after having trapped its prey, he delivers the fatal bite; at the same time, he immobilizes it and grasps it between his claws. His back is curved and all of the muscles in his body are tensed from the violent effort of the hunt; his savage expression, his gaping mouth and the folds of skin on the muzzle convey all of his aggression and determination, leaving hardly any doubt as to the outcome of the combat.

The unfinished nature of the bronze between the paws of the lion proves that this was the point at which the animal was fixed to its support. To give an idea of what the group to which this lion belonged would have looked like, one can compare this statuette to a basin handle, also in bronze, found at Olympia, which represents two lions attacking a young stag. One feline is positioned at the haunches, the other at the neck. Their prey, deprived of the safety of the woods, twists its head back and stretches its legs in one final leap.

The motif of the large cat (or of two symmetrical animals) attacking its prey has its origins in Near Eastern art. In Greek iconography, it also often appears in the minor arts (Corinthian ceramics of the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) as well as in architectural sculpture, such as on two of the Archaic pediments on the Athenian Acropolis.

Chronologically, this figurine is probably later than the handle from Olympia: the thick, freely scattered curls of the mane, the realism of the muzzle, the developed musculature of the body and the powerful, yet supple, proportions argue for a date from the second half of the fifth century B.C.

### CONDITION

Superb condition. Fine Patina with traces of red cuprite

### PROVENANCE

Ex-Swiss private collection, 1960's-1970's, Geneva ; Ex-American private collection, collected in the 1980's -1990's. On loan to the Getty Museum, Los Angeles 1988/89 to 1996

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

The handle from Olympia:

GAUER W., Die Bronzegefäße von Olympia, Berlin, 1991, p. 240, P 26, pl. 62 (the same in MALLWITZ A. – HERRMANN H.-V., Die Funde aus Olympia, Athens, 1980, p. 120, n. 181, pl. 81).

On Greek representations of lions, see:

RICHTER G.M.A., Animals in Greek Sculpture, Oxford-New York, 1930, pp. 3-9.

VERMEULE C., Greek Funerary Animals, 450-300 B.C. in American Journal of Archaeology 76, 1972, pp. 50 ss.