

HEAD OF A LION

Greek, 5th - 4th century B.C.

Marble

H: 22.9 cm (9 in)

Reference: 29104



Classical antiquity was dealing with two major functions of lion's representations in stone: figures as funerary monuments and heads as waterspouts. The latter is frequent in the fountain house being attached to the wall; water from the pipe gushed from the open mouth of the animal (many representations on the black-figure vases capture that image). Similar heads were employed for the gutters of a building – its protruding concave tongue would have channeled the rainwater down.

Although the cavity below the muzzle indicates the wide open mouth, this piece did not serve as a water spout. The fragment still shows a considerable thickness of the marble in the back, that is why the idea of a statue is more plausible. Funerary statues usually show the animal crouching on his front legs, his head faces the viewer; sometimes the body is seen from the side and the head is turned to confront the viewer. Lions symbolized strength, courage, ferocity – their images, standing or crouching, were highly suitable as tomb guardians. They were placed in pairs at the corners of family grave plots as the monuments of Kerameikos, ancient cemetery of Athens, testify, or, in case of a royal tomb they would line the sides of the alley leading to the entrance of mausoleum or even be placed at the roof level as the reconstructions of the famous Halicarnassus Mausoleum suggest.

Greek sculptor from the Greek mainland could hardly see the real animal, and his knowledge was based on the tradition transmitted by the generations of artists. The features are far from to be naturalistic and they are highly stylized; especially remarkable is almost human expression of raised eyebrows and deep-set eyes. The open mouth shows individually carved teeth. Two rather small and round ears are seen between flamelike tufts going in different directions, the mane consisted of a few distinct rows.

CONDITION

Fragmentary but without restorations

PROVENANCE

Ex- US Private collection, 1989

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EXHIBITED

Seattle Art Fair, 2019

SOFA, Chicago 2017

Mnemosyne Exhibition in the Helly Nahmad Gallery, New York 2015

SPRING MASTERS, New York 2014

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