

A close-up photograph of a marble sculpture depicting the torso of a young satyr. The sculpture is made of light-colored marble with visible veins and some surface wear. The figure's head is turned to the left, and the torso is slightly twisted. The lighting highlights the contours of the body and the texture of the marble.

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Torso of a Young Satyr

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Roman, Imperial Period
ca. 1st–2nd century A.D.

Torso of a Young Satyr

Marble
h. 78 cm
30 ¾ in.

Provenance

Edouard Geladakis, Paris, by 1912;
Private Collection, Belgium;
with Galeria Guerin et Rapin, Quai Voltaire, Paris, by 1999;
Private Collection, acquired from the above.

Literature

Salomon Reinach, *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine*, vol. 5.1, Paris, 1924, p. 83, no. 7 ("à Paris chez Geladakis en 1912").
D. Vanhove (ed.), *Marbres helléniques: De la carrière au chef-d'œuvre*, Crédit Communal de Belgique, Brussels, 1987, no.122, p.177.

Exhibitions

Marbres helléniques: De la carrière au chef-d'œuvre, Crédit Communal de Belgique, Brussels, December 1987 - March 1988.

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The present torso, of exceptional quality and presence, represents a young male divinity or other mythological figure, shown resting his weight on his right leg, while the left leg, at ease, seems to step forward. The torso is well rendered and slender, and from its proportions clearly shows a young rather than full-grown man. The figure seems to have been leaning slightly towards the left, as can be seen from the bend in the right side of the torso, above the hips and below the chest. Both arms are now missing, but due to the lack of a stint or hand fragment protruding from the figure's right side, we can presume that the right arm could hold its own weight, and was likely slightly extended out forward, perhaps holding a small attribute that would further identify the subject with a mythological antecedent. Both shoulders of the figure, and indeed much of the upper left side, are covered by a cloak made of an animal's skin: the face of the beast and one of its paws are visible resting on top of the figure's right pectoral.

This torso was catalogued as belonging to a statue of Hercules in both Reinach's 1924 publication and the Crédit Communal de Belgique exhibition catalog of 1987. However, there are a number of unique iconographical elements in the sculpture that complicate a quick identification with the slayer of the Nemean Lion.

In the first place, Hercules is rarely if ever shown as a slender youth as in the present sculpture. This physique is much more common for other figures from Greco-Roman mythology: Dionysus/Bacchus, Apollo, and Cupid/Eros, as well as youthful satyrs. Additionally, in the Roman period idealized portraits of youths were often carved in the style of heroes and gods, following the fashion of Imperial elites aligning their portraiture with divine statuary. Indeed, if Hercules is shown as anything less than a full-grown man, he is rather satirically portrayed as a chubby, Cherub-like child, a type which is well known from the example in the Galleria Borghese (Figure 1).

Second, the animal skin in which the youth is wrapped does not appear to be the skin of a lion, but rather a panther. The cat does not appear to have a mane. Even more importantly, the Nemean lion skin is worn in a very specific fashion by Hercules in every depiction of him donning the impervious fur from the earliest Greek vase paintings onward through the most famous examples of Roman statuary: the paws are knotted together under the hero's neck, and the upper jaw of the lion serves as a hood that Hercules wears over his head. The famous Hercules from the Giustiniani collection, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Figure 2), is just one of many examples.

The position of the beast's head and paw on the present sculpture are, rather, much more reminiscent of the famous sculpture attributed to Praxiteles known as the Resting Satyr (Figures 3-5). Over 100 examples of this type are known: it was popular in antiquity due to its association with the famous Classical Greek master sculptor (one of the few artists whose name has survived from the period) as well as for its decorative subject matter and aptitude for display in the gardens of a Roman villa. The exaggerated jutting out of the right hip on the present sculpture could also be compared to the resting satyrs, who emphatically lean on a stump to show their leisurely attitude.

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However, this solution too is not fully satisfying, as there are several inconsistencies with the iconography of the resting satyr as well. In depictions of satyrs, as well as of their patron deity Dionysus, the panther skin (sometimes a faun skin) is tied around one shoulder and loops under the opposite arm, as seen in the three examples below. Our torso's panther skin does not hang in this manner but instead is seemingly draped over both shoulders. The left arm, were it not broken and continued, would seemingly be entirely swathed in the cloak-like skin (it should be noted that perhaps the artist intended two layers of garments, an animal skin with a cloth mantle on top).

This more heavily draped upper torso calls to mind the iconography of yet another mythological figure, this one exclusively Roman in origin. Silvanus was the Roman deity of the woods, uncultivated lands, and rural boundaries, acting as a protector of fields and cattle. He is typically depicted in Roman statuary with one arm obscured by a large deer skin, and in the crook of his arm, supported by the skin, holding various fruits and crops (Figure 6).

One further detail must be taken into consideration: atop the left shoulder of our statue is a partially preserved thin band of marble which alights upon the torso in a wave-like pattern. This fragment may represent either long hair emanating from the now missing head of the sculpture, or the terminal end of a fillet worn around the head. If the former is true, this would provide further evidence to associate this torso with Dionysus or a satyr, as both were often shown with long hair when in youthful guise. If the latter, perhaps further identification with Silvanus would be appropriate, as the god is often shown wearing a pine wreath, with bands that cascade down the shoulders, such as in the bronze figurine now in the British Museum (Figure 7). In the absence of further evidence, we have chosen to call this torso a 'young satyr,' primarily because of the panther skin, which is only associated with Dionysus and his followers the satyrs, as well as the youthfulness of the figure, where Silvanus is typically depicted as a bearded adult.

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Fig. 1: Rome, Galleria Borghese, CIII.



Fig. 2: New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 03.12.14

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Fig. 3-5: Resting Satyrs, (left) Louvre, MA 644, (middle) Munich, Glyptothek, inv. 288, (right) Rome, Capitoline Museums, inv. 739



Fig. 6: Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek

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Figure 7: London, The British Museum, 1865,0712.18

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