

COLNAGHI



Lower Column Fragment
Roman, Imperial Period, 1st to 2nd century A.D.

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ROMAN

Imperial Period, 1st – 2nd Century A.D.

LOWER COLUMN FRAGMENT

Karystia green marble on a white marble base

100 x 45cm;
39 3/8 x 17 3/4 in.

Provenance

Private collection, Italy.

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This fragment preserves the lower portion of a monolithic column shaft, broken away unevenly at the top and raised upon a moulded white marble base. It is cut from *cipollino verde*, the green Karystian marble whose beauty lies wholly in its figure: pale green, grey and white strata run the length of the shaft in long, wavy, close-packed bands, folding and rippling like the layers of an onion, the very feature that gave the stone its Italian name. Millennia of weathering have softened the surface and warmed its tone, and the breaks at the summit lay bare the same undulating grain within. Even shorn of its capital and upper drum, the fragment retains the quiet authority of its scale and the arresting movement of its veining.

The stone itself is among the most celebrated of the coloured marbles of antiquity. Known to the Romans as *marmor Carystium*, “the marble of Karystos,” it was quarried on the south-western coast of the Greek island of Euboea, between Styra and Karystos on the slopes of Mount Ochi, where the ancient workings survive with mine-faces more than a hundred metres high. Its distinctive white-and-green body, banded with thick wavy green veins of chlorite and epidote, was likened by a Roman poet to the waves of the sea. First worked by the Greeks, it was being shipped to Rome by the first century B.C. Pliny records columns of it already adorning the house of Caesar’s engineer Mamurra, and when the Karystos quarries passed into imperial ownership in A.D. 17, its use became general throughout the capital.¹ Prized above all for columns, it was carried across the whole extent of the empire, from Britain to Lebanon, Egypt and North Africa, to grace the temples, basilicas, libraries, theatres and baths of the Roman world, where monolithic shafts rose in the Forum of Trajan at Rome and in their hundreds in the Severan complex at Leptis Magna.

Such columns belonged to the great Roman appetite for marmora, the coloured and figured stones gathered from every province of the empire and prized as much for their rarity and their distant origins as for their splendour. To raise a hall or a portico on shafts of imported cipollino, porphyry or giallo antico was to display both wealth and the reach of Roman power.

¹ Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, 36.48.

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