



COLNAGHI

Sculptural fragments from the Temple of
Mercury, Pompeii
ca. 1930

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ANONYMOUS

Sculptural fragments from the Temple of Mercury, Pompeii, ca. 1870

Albumen print

19 x 24.5

7 1/2 x 9 1/2 in.

Provenance

Bruno Tartarin, Paris.

COLNAGHI



LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

BRUSSELS

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This photograph depicts a group of sculptural and architectural fragments from the Temple of Mercury at Pompeii, arranged in an outdoor yard following their excavation. Rather than presenting the monument in situ, the image records a moment in the early archaeological treatment of the site, when carved elements were removed, studied and temporarily assembled prior to any systematic reconstruction or museum display.

At the centre are stacked Corinthian capitals richly carved with acanthus leaves, flanked by relief blocks and decorative elements, including lion heads, a theatrical mask and a winged figure. The grouping appears to reflect the practical realities of excavation and storage rather than deliberate photographic staging, with fragments assembled as they were unearthed and set aside for study. The photographer's intervention lies instead in the choice of viewpoint, framing these disparate elements into a coherent image that balances documentation with visual clarity

The photograph belongs to the flourishing tradition of archaeological photography in southern Italy in the later nineteenth century, when photographers working in Naples and Pompeii supplied images to scholars, institutions and Grand Tour travellers. It reflects a transitional moment in the history of the site, capturing antiquities not as restored artefacts, but as newly unearthed objects in the process of classification.

Although the photographer remains unidentified, the image is consistent in subject and execution with the work of leading practitioners active in the region during this period, such as Giorgio Sommer or Robert Rive. The photograph appears to be rare, with no other version having been identified, further enhancing its interest as a record of early archaeological practice at Pompeii.