

COLNAGHI



A Monumental Roman Left Hand

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Roman Imperial
2nd century A.D.

Monumental Left Hand

Bronze
h. 45 cm
17 3/4 in. (including stand)

Provenance

Ex Frits Phillips, Eindhoven, Netherlands, before 1980;
Private European collection, 1980s;
Private collection, London.

Interpol Database certificate no.12907-242493



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During the height of the Roman Empire, monumental bronze statues were not simply works of art; they were instruments of authority and prestige. By the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., Rome possessed the wealth and technical mastery to produce over life-sized figures in hollow bronze, a medium that required immense skill and resources. These statues were intended to impress and endure, often commemorating emperors, generals, and gods in a scale that placed them beyond the ordinary realm of mortals.

Such bronzes were used to dominate public spaces and convey imperial power. In forums, baths, and temples, the towering images of rulers reminded citizens of Rome's strength and the divine favour said to rest upon its leaders. The famous equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius in Rome is perhaps the best surviving example of this tradition; its imposing scale and lifelike rendering conveyed both the emperor's authority and his humanity. Another renowned piece, the fragments of the colossal bronze statue of Constantine the Great, once stood in the heart of the capital and would have dwarfed viewers, embodying the emperor's near-divine status. Even earlier examples, like the Bronze of Germanicus or the over life-sized bronzes of emperors found at sites such as Herculaneum, illustrate how these works were strategically placed to broadcast messages of victory and control.

Bronze was the perfect medium for such statements. Its ability to hold fine details gave these figures a vivid presence, while the sheer scale was designed to inspire awe. These statues were not simply commemorative; they were a visual language of power, cast in metal to endure beyond the individual and the age in which they were created.

Cf. Russell, M., 'Farewell two arms: a Roman bronze body part from Halmaker, West Sussex' in *Sussex Archaeological collections*, 157, 2019, pp.125-132, for similar fragment; Formigli, E., 'La tecnica di costruzione delle statue di Riace' in *Ministero dei Beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo, VI serie volume speciale*, Roma, 1984, pp.107-142; Bol P. C., *Antike Bronzetechnik*, Monaco, 1985; Lahusen, G., Formigli, E., 'Ergebnisse der kunsthistorisch-technischen Analysen von zwei römischen Grossbronzen in den Museen des Vatikan', in *BMonMusPont*, VIII, 1988, pp.21-53; very similar to a bronze hand excavated in Netherlands in Voorburg in 1771, cf. Van Wijn, H., *Historische en letterkundige avondstonden*, 1800, II Vol. A4ff; for a possibly corresponding right hand see Christie's New York, *Antiquities*, Thursday 6 December 2007, New York, 2007, no.178 (Figure 1).

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Figure 1: Christie's New York, *Antiquities*, Thursday 6 December 2007, New York, 2007, no.178.

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