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Greek

Hellenistic, late 4th–early 3rd century B.C.

Armlet with a Herakles Knot

Gold

diameter: 12.3 cm; 4 7/8 in.

width: 2.7 cm; 1 1/2 in.

weight: 77.5 g.

Provenance

Nadia Kapamadji (1901–1978), a distinguished professional numismatist, Florange et Ciani, Paris, 1972;

Private collection, Germany, acquired from the above;

Private collection, New York, acquired in 1999;

Christie's, New York, 13 December 2013, lot 250.



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Greek jewellery was never pure ornament without meaning but was charged with decorative symbols borrowed from myth and religion, and the natural world of plant and animal life. Worked in carefully hammered gold-sheet; embellished with intricately delicate, beaded-wire filigree imitating acanthus leaves, palmettes, and lotus buds; adorned at the centre with cunning repoussé appliqués of doves, a lion, and a piping Pan shown in a rare, frontal pose — this gold armlet is an outstanding example of this artistic principle, and of Hellenistic craftsmanship broadly.

As its centrepiece, the armlet features a cunningly wrought Herakles Knot. This potent symbol is believed to have originated from Egypt, where its history as an amulet dates from the beginning of the Second Millennium BC. The Greeks, in turn, associated the amulet with the protective and sexual prowess of their greatest hero, Herakles, and it later became conjoined with the royal authority of the Macedonian kings, especially Alexander the Great. Its multiple connotations of fortune, power, fertility, healing, and protection from evil made the Herakles Knot a well-loved subject for jewellery pieces throughout the Greek world, be it on Hellenistic necklaces, diadems, finger rings, and thigh-bands, and on the grandest of ancient Greek bracelets, such as this one, made to encircle the upper arms of Greece's female elite.

For a bracelet of similar construction compare the example said to be from Taranto, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 152 in D. Williams and J. Ogden, *Greek Gold*,

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Jewellery of the Classical World. The New York bracelet shares the same wide hoop, although ribbed on the exterior, with nearly identical collars similarly pinned in place, which are joined to lion heads rather than a Herakles knot as here. Herakles knots are frequently populated with applied figures; see for example the knot from a strap diadem centered by a figure of a siren, from Chersonesos, now in the Hermitage, no. 131, op. cit.

COLNAGHI

COLNAGHI *London*

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+44 (0)20 7491 7408

contact@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Madrid*

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.
28004 MADRID

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
BY APPOINTMENT

spain@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *New York*

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065
USA

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+1 (917) 388-3825

newyork@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Brussels*

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30
1000 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

brussels@colnaghi.com