



## Lion, Element Of Recumbent Marble - France XIVth Century



45 000 EUR

Period : Before 16th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Marble

Width : 17 cm

Height : 26,5 cm

Depth : 30 cm

### Description

This magnificent marble lion is an element of a 14th century recumbent statue. In the Middle Ages, recumbent effigies are sculptures that represent people lying down, they are generally tombs. Symbols of the continuity of life, they have many attributes that refer to the personality of the deceased. The tradition wants that each person enjoys three recumbents: a recumbent body, a recumbent entrails and a recumbent heart. This is explained by the difficult conservation of the body after death which requires the separation of these elements. At the feet of these recumbent figures are sculpted animals, a tradition which dates from the 13th century and which disappeared very quickly during the Renaissance. In many cases, the animals are charged with various meanings, proof of a real taste for

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iconographic complexity among medieval artists. The representation of these animals being symbolic, their interpretation can be multiple. These animals are believed to assist in the journey of the deceased to the afterlife, and sometimes their presence can be a sign of protection of the living from the return of the dead. It can also recall the circumstances of the death of the deceased, as well as refer to his virtues, characteristics or aptitudes. Some historians also see a connection between these animals and tetramorphs, as medieval artists had a tradition of applying the symbol to the interpretation of the natural world confused with the spiritual. The lion is the animal most often depicted and perfectly reflects this iconographic complexity. It is most often carved at the feet of men and can appear alone or in pairs. This animal generally carries a positive connotation and has the role of guardian, which is why it is often represented at the entrance to sacred places. This protective image developed in medieval bestiaries because, from then on, it was accepted that the lion slept with its eyes open. At that time, he not only protected the House of God but also men: his role was to accompany the deceased in death. Since ancient times, the lion has adorned tombs because legend said that at birth, the lion cub spent three days in limbo before being brought back to life by its parent, which is why the lion becomes a symbol of resurrection. . The lion can also signal the deceased's membership of the nobility and translates its values such as courage, strength or power. These characteristics lead the lion to hold a prominent place in heraldry. The animal is indeed admired for its majestic nature, its power and its taste for combat which makes it the king of animals. In rarer cases, the lion can be associated with the danger that threatens the faithful in the person of the Devil. It therefore carries an ambivalent symbolism which sometimes leads it to be considered as the incarnation of the Antichrist. It remains, however, in the tradition of recumbent figures, a positive

symbol which refers to the father or the master and seems to signify the importance of the character represented. The base of our sculpture is provided with a vegetal decoration with ivy leaves and fruits that look like apples. The ivy carries a symbolism linked to the fidelity of the couple. He is often represented next to the dog which bears the same symbolism. We find an example at the foot of a recumbent figure in the Saint-Denis basilica. Ivy can also refer to immortality and its heart-shaped leaves are generally accompanied by small fruits grouped in threes or fours, a tradition stemming from Merovingian sculpture. Moreover, the apple also refers to immortality. Fruit of the knowledge of good and evil in the Bible, the apple is also a symbol of power because of its spherical shape which recalls that of the Earth: to hold it is to possess power. In Greek mythology, the apple is also a symbol of love and fertility and is associated with Aphrodite and her son Eros. Our sculpture was sealed with lead under the base and carved out of marble. Originally, the recumbent figures were made of stone, but production soon turned to marble, a material that is more difficult to work with, but more noble. On one side of the base, a slight hollow probably indicates the place where the lion was attached to the recumbent. Some animals were carved from the same block of marble as the recumbent. This is the case of the Recumbent statue of Robert the Child made by Pépin de Huy in 1320 and preserved in the Basilica of Saint-Denis. As production evolves, animals tend to be sculpted separately from the recumbent to which they belong, sometimes even by two different artists. This is the case with our lion and that of the recumbent statue of Louis de Sancerre from the beginning of the 15th century. The representation of the lion is very stylized here, especially in the work of the curls of its mane. This element as well as the position of the animal's body, with visible ribs, remind us of the work carried out on the lions of the Recumbent statue of Clement VI preserved in the abbey

church of Saint-Robert de la Chaise-Dieu. Our recumbent lion is also sculpted with large paws and an angular muzzle that shows its teeth. These specificities are found on the Recumbent statue of Philippe IV le Bel made around 1327 and preserved in the basilica of Saint-Denis. Its physical particularities, its position and the attributes that surround it lead one to think that our recumbent lion carries two symbols: protection and immortality. Beautifully crafted, its specificities allow it to be included in the production of recumbent animals from the 14th century.