



## St Leonard In Stone - France 14th Century



30 000 EUR

Period : Before 16th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Stone

Width : 28 cm

Height : 95 cm

Depth : 20 cm

### Description

This rare 14th-century statue depicts a little-known saint in Christian history: St. Leonard, the patron saint of prisoners. It comes from the private collection of antique dealer Fernand Reppert, who worked in Nancy in the first half of the 20th century. St. Leonard's life was quite unusual. He was born towards the end of the 5th century and his godfather was Clovis. He remained close to royalty and had the privilege of pardoning prisoners whom he considered sufficiently repentant of their actions to be released. He later went on to found a hermitage in the middle of the forest thanks to his new position as deacon in Limousin. The story goes that during a visit by the King and Queen of Aquitaine, the saint helped the queen through her difficult labor with his prayers. In gratitude, the

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king offered Leonard the portion of forest that his donkey could cover in 24 hours. From that day on, the saint welcomed freed prisoners and performed the miracle of bringing forth an inexhaustible spring. He also built a chapel called "Notre Dame de sous les arbres" (Our Lady under the Trees). He ended his life peacefully, and some even say that "in death, he performed miracles."

Romanesque art can be seen in the architecture of churches, mainly on the tympanums. Column statues then developed, which subsequently led to statuary gradually detaching itself from the walls. However, the general form of round-sculpted statuary remained fairly linear at the beginning of the Gothic period, as we can see in the example presented in the gallery. The faces of the characters became more humanized and distinctive. It is thanks to their faces and attributes that we can differentiate between the holy figures. We can compare our work to that seen at Notre-Dame Collegiate Church in Normandy. This limestone statue, measuring nearly 1 meter, depicts Saint Francis (patron saint of deacons) or Saint Lawrence (a 3rd-century martyr who is said to have been burned alive on a metal gridiron). It also dates from the 14th century and traces of polychromy remain. The folds of the garment fall straight and stop above the foot, as was customary in France at the end of the 14th century. On his left hand, we can see a maniple, a strip of cloth worn by priests, deacons, and subdeacons from the 9th century onwards, also known as a sudarium in the Middle Ages. Our work, made in France, combines elements typical of this period. First of all, it is the size of statues made to adorn churches or chapels. His face is characteristic of this period, with almond-shaped eyes with slightly protruding black pupils, eyebrows marked by polychromy, a straight, aquiline nose, and a small, closed mouth covered in red polychromy. As he is a member of the clergy, he has been tonsured and his remaining hair is styled vertically with very slight waves. On the right

side, between his hair and his collar, we can see a trace of a trepan, a small drill used to reach hard-to-access recesses in order to clear them. We can also see a few wrinkles around his lips, as well as prominent ears; faces were very figurative at the time. In the 14th century, life was difficult, so artists began to depict emotions on the faces of their characters so that the faithful would not feel alone in their suffering. St. Leonard was a deacon, from the Greek "diakonos" meaning servant, and was responsible for distributing alms. He therefore wears the typical medieval deacon's vestments, i.e., an alb with a collar, a deacon's stole, and a dalmatic over the top. The dalmatic has slits on each side and the stole protrudes slightly at the front, so we can see the fringes sticking out. The folds of the garment fall straight, rather than in a V shape as was customary in the 15th century. The attributes that allow us to confirm that this is indeed St. Leonard are, first and foremost, the chains he holds in his right hand. They are rendered with rare precision and are highly ornate, both inside the rings and along his cloak. As the patron saint of prisoners, he freed a number of them during his lifetime, which is why he carries their chains. In his other hand, like many saints, he carries the Bible. What is unusual is that it is not in his hand but resting on his fingers and held only by his thumb. The artist took the time to carve different pages on the top to make the object more realistic. The book has a fleur-de-lis clasp on its main cover that allows it to be closed. This symbolizes the importance of entrusting oneself to divine Providence in times of pain. In the Song of Songs, there is mention of a flower that grows among thorns, "A lily among thorns" (2:1), yet does not care about its surroundings in order to grow. His feet are pointed, as was customary in 14th-century representations, and his right foot protrudes slightly from the base of the sculpture. The polychromy is original, and traces of it can be seen in various places, mainly on the saint's face. Numerous tool marks are also visible

throughout the statue, on his head, his clothing, and the back of the statue. An old collector's label, probably affixed by Mr. Reppert, remains on the back. It reads "St. Leonard, Normandy, 13th century." However, upon closer examination, we can confirm that this work dates from the 14th century. Finally, the sculpture may seem simplistic at first glance, yet many details are revealed to the viewer. The artist wanted to make his work as realistic as possible while maintaining a minimalist style, in keeping with the early Gothic tradition of focusing on the essentials and impressing the viewer. The Gothic period bridged the gap in statuary between the demands of the architectural setting and the natural model, which reached its peak during the Renaissance.