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FRAGMENT OF A LABORS-OF-
HERAKLES SARCOPHAGUS
Honolulu Academy of Arts, Honolulu, Hawaii
Gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke (3602)
Formerly in the S. Pozzi collection, Paris
Marble, H: 0.56 m.; W: 0.51 m.
Figure of bearded Herakles originally between
columns with drawn bow and arrow, prob-
ably part of the labor of the Stymphalian
birds. Mid-second century A.D.
Collection S. Pozzi, G. Petit (June 25-27, 1919),
p. 363, no ill.; Del Chiaro, West Coast Collections 31,
p. 32, ill.

Sarcophagus Relief Depicting Hercules (#3602)
Marble

Roman, 3rd-4th century, A.D.
Gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke, 1932

ARTIST: Unknown

SUBJECT: This is the fifth of the twelve tasks imposed on Hercules by his cousin, Eurystheus, King of Mycenaeans. See "background information" card on this Greek myth. Hercules is shooting arrows at a flock of dangerous man-eating birds at Lake Stymphalus in Arcadia. The title of this relief refers to his first task, killing the Nemean lion. However, Hercules was often portrayed wearing the lion skin.

MEDIUM AND TECHNIQUE: Marble fragment of irregular shape, height about 22 inches, with the greatest width about 20 inches. The figure is done in high relief. The face of Hercules seems more worn in this end piece than in the relief on the long side of the sarcophagus. The eyes are not as clearly defined but one can still see drill marks in the corners of the mouth and in the hair.

STYLE: Hercules was celebrated for his strength and is usually represented in art as large and muscular, either naked or as here, draped with the Nemean lion's skin. He wears it as a hood and cape, knotted on his chest. In his extended left hand he holds a bow, and with his right hand across his chest he clutches the end of the arrow and the bow string. There is another hint in the relief, besides his bow and arrow, to indicate this is a representation of his fifth task, the killing of the man-eating Stymphalean birds; the lower right as the viewer looks at the relief, there appears to be a fragment of feathers.

INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS: Perhaps the children would like to imagine they are Hercules, out to shoot the dangerous birds, armed only with a bow and arrow. Point out the lion skin hood over his head.

Relief from Sarcophagus #3602
"Hercules Dressed in Skin of Nemean Lion" (end piece)
Gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke, 1932
Marble

Spanish Court
Roman
3rd or 4th cen. A.D.

ARTIST: Unknown

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Sarcophagus Relief Depicting a Labor of Hercules

Roman, Mid 2nd century A.D.
Marble

Gift of Anna Rice Cooke, 1932 (3602) (3601)

A sarcophagus is a stone coffin often adorned on its exterior with inscriptions and relief sculpture. Intended for public display, sarcophagi advertised the wealth and social status of the deceased and his or her family by means of their size and the complexity and quality of their sculptures. Since Romans favored certain common themes for sarcophagi including the Labors of Hercules, they were often bought ready-made. Herakles, a Greek and Roman hero known as Hercules by the Romans, was celebrated for his twelve near-impossible labors or feats. This fragment depicts Hercules wearing the skin of the Nemean lion he killed knotted on his chest, the lion's head over his own as if it were a helmet. Hercules holds a bow and pulls back its string to shoot the Stymphalian birds. His quiver is visible below his left arm, and the wing of a fallen bird appears on the left edge. Purchased at the same time as the sarcophagus fragment with two additional images of Hercules on display at left and of the same thickness as the second fragment, it is thought that the two are part of the same sarcophagus. Microscopic analysis of the marble used in each piece supports this hypothesis.

Sarcophagus Relief Depicting Labors of Hercules

Sarcophagus Relief Depicting a Labor of Hercules, Roman, mid-2nd century A.D.

Marble

Gift of Anna Rice Cooke, 1932 (3602)

A sarcophagus is a stone coffin often adorned with inscriptions and relief sculpture. Intended for public display, sarcophagi advertised the wealth and social status of the deceased and his or her family by means of their size and the complexity and quality of their workmanship. This sarcophagus fragment depicts two of the twelve labors of Herakles, a Greek and Roman hero (known as Hercules by the Romans) celebrated for his heroic and near-impossible feats. Here, he wears the skin and head of the Nemean lion he killed, and he draws his bow to shoot the Stymphalian birds. Visible below his left arm is his quiver, and the wing of a fallen bird appears on the left edge.

This fragment and the adjacent example are thought to be from the same sarcophagus. Microscopic analysis of the marble used in each piece supports this hypothesis.