

## LITTLE BARBARIANS

## An Encounter



THEY STARTED OUT TOGETHER but now are scattered among five European cities in three countries. Four of them – the best known – alternate between the aging galleries of the Naples Museum and a stygian basement, displaced by a series of far glitzier temporary exhibitions (Figure 1). Three more sprawl in a sunny room in Venice’s Museo Archeologico, overlooking Italy’s most glorious public space, the Piazza San Marco (Figure 2). An eighth cowers claustrophobically amid a crowd of marbles in the Vatican’s Galleria dei Candelabri (Figure 3). The ninth squats under a staircase in the Musée Granet in Aix-en-Provence, fearfully eyeing the descending visitor (Figure 4). And the tenth kneels defiantly in the middle of a huge room of Greco-Roman sculpture in the Louvre, shadowboxing the crowds of passing tourists (Figure 5).

Let’s put them together, and begin again.

Not one of them stands upright. They kneel, cower, sink, or sprawl in attitudes of corporeal abandon, pain, despair, and death. One or two grimace and gesture wildly in my direction as if trying to catch my eye. Several are naked or only half-clothed. And they’re small, only four feet tall (Figure 6). No opponents in sight, either: That’s odd. They look as though a thunderbolt hit them and another’s on the way.

Venturing closer, I notice their strange combination of knobby, aggressive muscles and contorted, often concave postures (Figure 7). But the marble’s high polish reflects my gaze. Bouncing back, it never quite returns to the same place (Figure 8). Flicking against the shiny, glancing

surface of the stone, it animates it. Flesh puckers, muscles ripple, bodies writhe, and cloth flutters (Figure 9) as I scan them. A primitive world of brute strength and savagery throbs, clashes, and collapses before my eyes. A giant among midgets, I’ve walked into a battlefield. The fighting is almost over, and the massacre has begun.

Towering over them and getting used to their glossy surface, I linger awhile. As I look closer, the crisp, dramatic, puckered modeling begins to thrust the individual parts into prominence. They begin to detach themselves from the whole, to float independently before my eyes, to jostle for my attention. I scrutinize the grimacing faces and recoil at the open, gaping wounds (Figures 10–11). One man screams dumbly; another snarls; a third gasps in pain; and several are frozen in death (Figure 12). Blood spurts out of the gashes, stickily coating the skin; it grabs my attention and makes me more than a bit uneasy.

Now almost myopically close, my glance is snared by the tactile: woven cloth, shiny swords, smooth skin, coarse hair. I notice textures, fissures, gouges, nicks, scratches, and holes: some rasping here, some drilling there (Figure 13). But on occasion the light still plays tricks, bringing the polished, semitranslucent stone to life and softening the men’s coarse features and rocklike muscles, and the cruel paraphernalia of war. Breaks and signs of weathering obtrude, along with a plethora of telltale seams, patches, and abrupt changes of stone color. A woman’s breast juts skyward, perfectly conical and startlingly white (Figure 13). Oho, the repairman at work! But decay’s sordid legacy snaps at his heels: Chipped

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Excerpt

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## ATTALOS, ATHENS, AND THE AKROPOLIS



FIGURE 1. (clockwise from top right) Naples Giant, Amazon, Persian, and Dying Gaul (Roman copies). From Rome; originals, ca. 200 BC. Marble; length of each figure, ca. 1.16 m. Naples, Museo Nazionale FAR 6013, 6012, 6104, 6015. Photo: Alinari/Art Resource 5270.

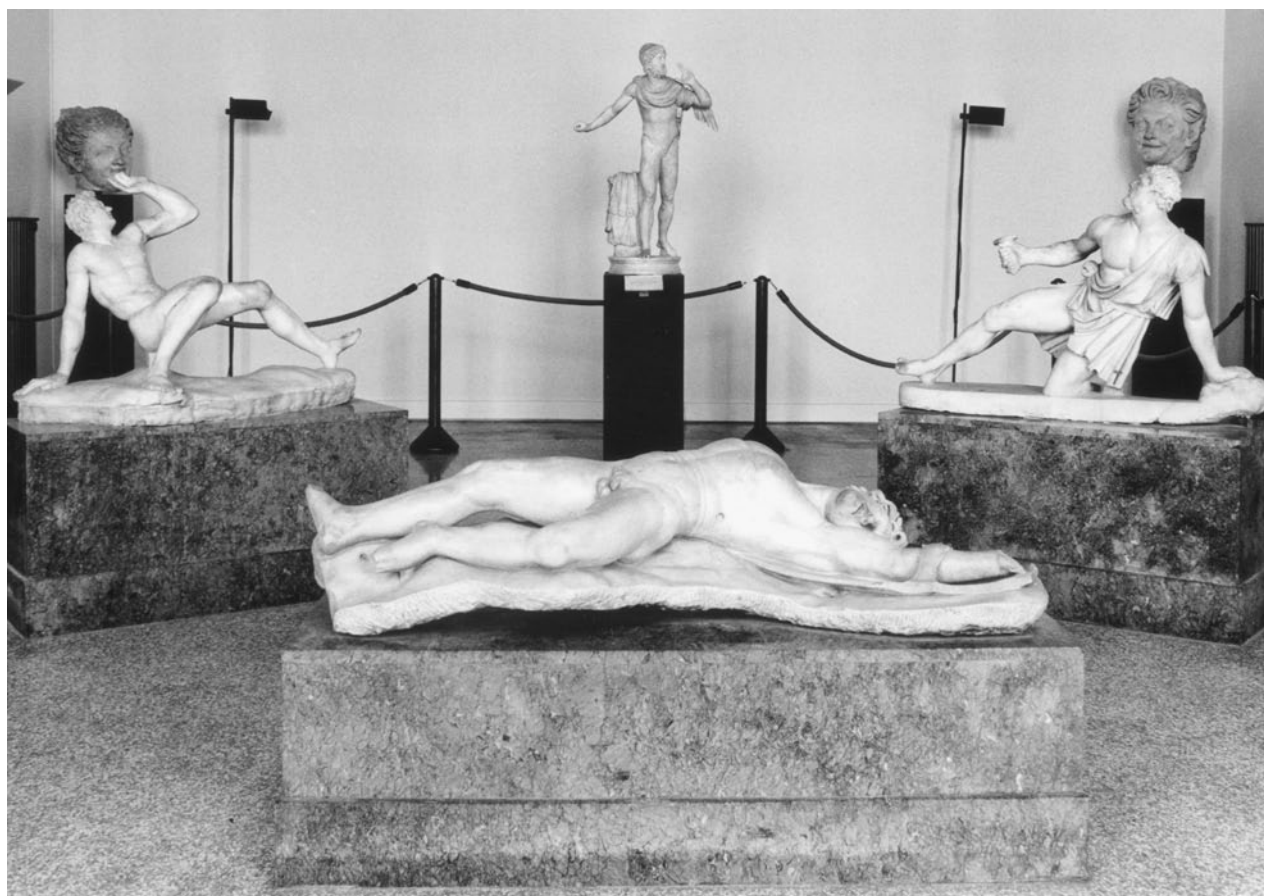


FIGURE 2. Venice Falling Gaul ("Breakdancer"), Dead Gaul, and Kneeling Gaul (Roman copies). In the background, the Ulysses, Figure 103. Rome; originals, ca. 200 BC. Marble; height 69 cm; length 1.36 m; height 76 cm, respectively. Venice, Museo Archeologico 55, 56, 57. Photo: Osvaldo Böhm.

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FIGURE 3. Vatican Persian (Roman copy). From Rome; original, ca. 200 BC. Marble; height 73 cm. Vatican, Galleria dei Candelabri 2794. Photo: Author.

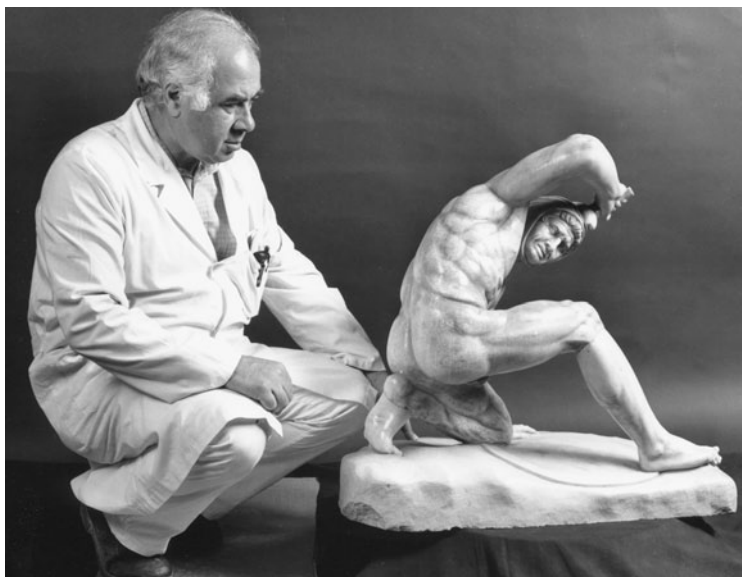


FIGURE 4. Aix Persian (Roman copy). From Rome or Frascati; original, ca. 200 BC. Marble; height 64 cm. Aix-en-Provence, Musée Granet. Photo: Centre Camille Jullian.



FIGURE 5. Paris Gaul (Roman copy). From Rome; original, ca. 200 BC. Marble; height 87 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre Ma 324. Photo: Chuzeville.

FIGURE 6. Vatican Persian. Photo: Vatican Museums XXXVI.27.25/1.



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FIGURE 7. Vatican Persian from below. Photo: Vatican Museums xxxvi.27.25/10.



FIGURE 8. Right thigh of the Vatican Persian. Photo: Vatican Museums xxxvi.27.25/11.

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FIGURE 9. Drapery of the Naples Amazon. Photo: Luciano Pedicini.

FIGURE 10. (*right*) Head of the Venice Kneeling Gaul. Photo: Osvaldo Böhm.

FIGURE 11. (*below*) Right side at waist of the Venice Dead Gaul. Photo: Osvaldo Böhm.

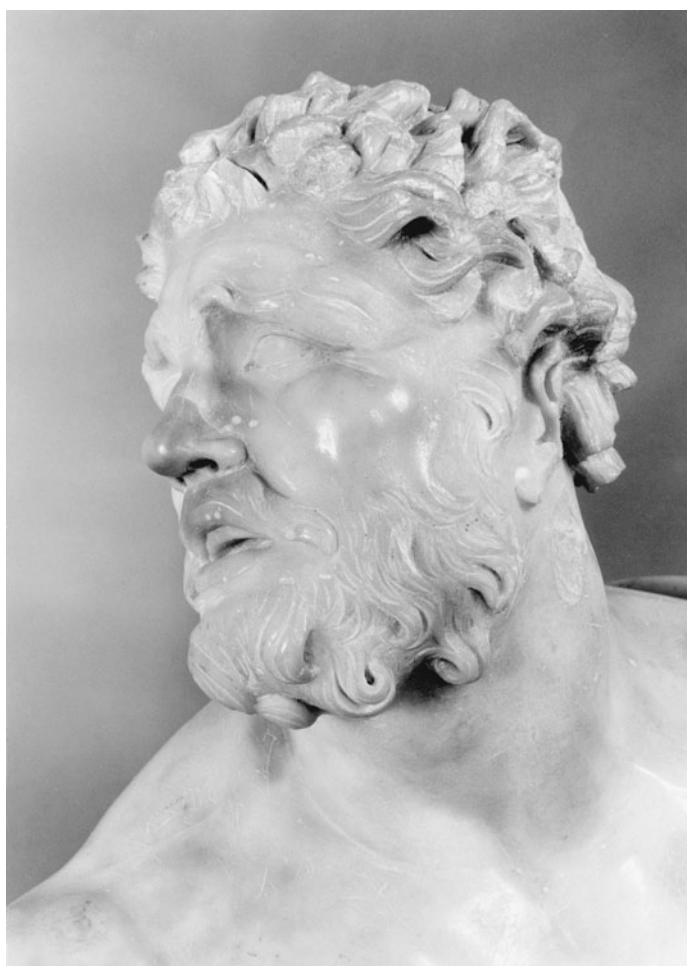
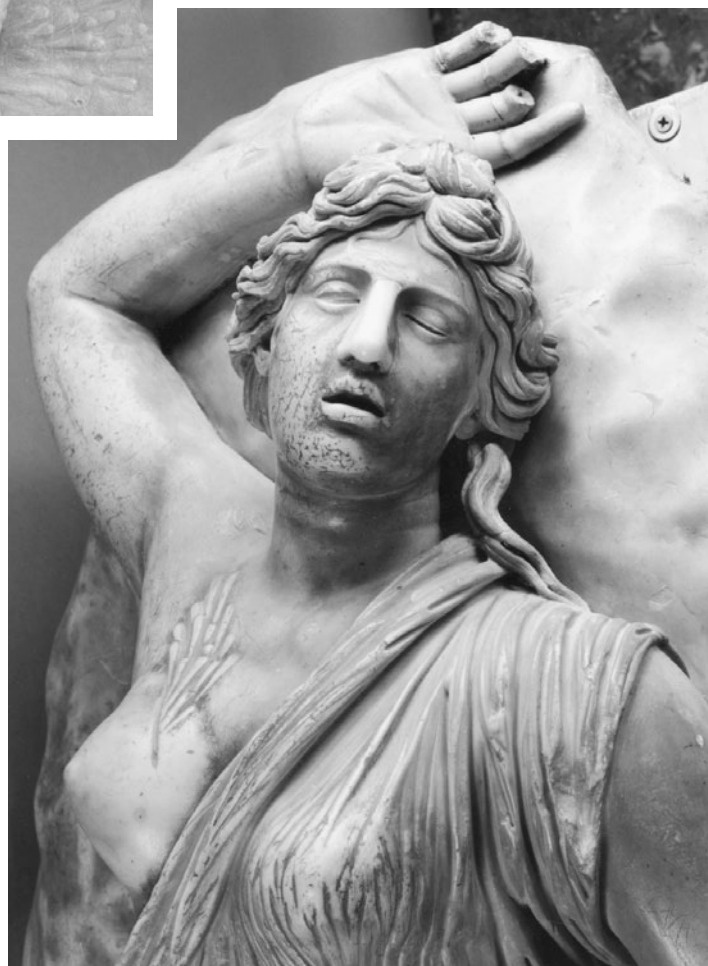




FIGURE 12. Torso and head of the Venice Dead Gaul. Photo: Osvaldo Böhm.

FIGURE 13. (*right*) Breast and head of the Naples Amazon. Photo: Luciano Pedicini.

FIGURE 14. (*below*) Naples Giant’s lionskin. Photo: Luciano Pedicini.



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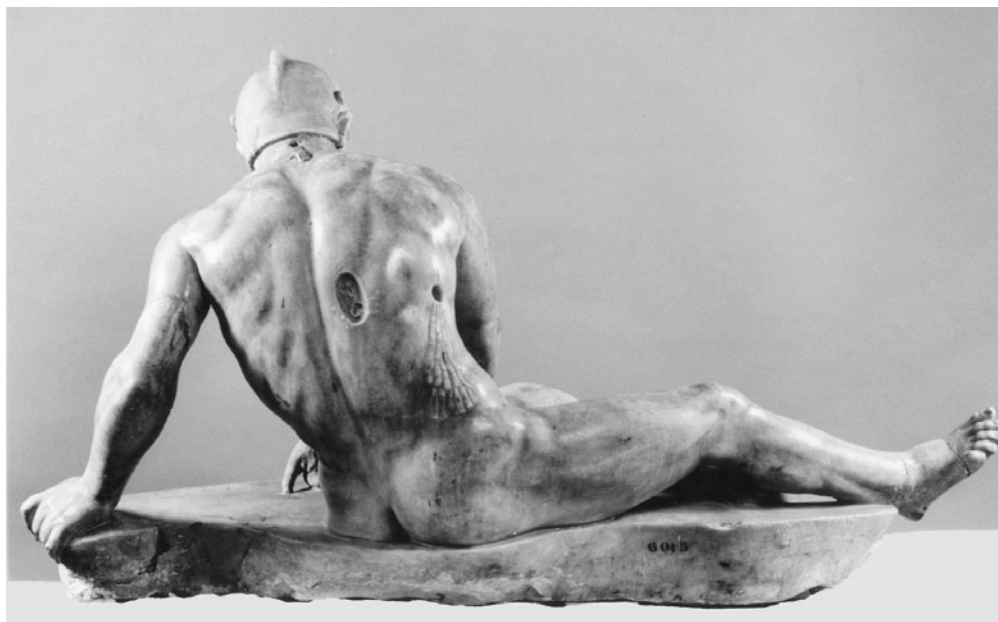


FIGURE 15. Back view of the Naples Dying Gaul. Photo: Luciano Pedicini.



FIGURE 16. Side view of the Venice Kneeling Gaul. Photo: Osvaldo Böhm.



FIGURE 17. Side view of the Venice Falling Gaul. Photo: Osvaldo Böhm.

plaster, hidden grime, and rusted iron jutting from amputated fingers, wrists, and scarred folds of clothing (Figure 14).

Curious to learn more, I begin to walk around them. Interesting: Their backs are completely finished, and one

or two even have wounds there (Figure 15). But several are much less three-dimensional than I thought. From the front they're wild and wanton, all jagged diagonals and zigzags, but from the side they look like flats for a stage play (Figures 16–17). Theatrical enough from in front,

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FIGURE 18. Side view of the Naples Amazon. Photo: Luciano Pedicini.



FIGURE 19. Side view of the Naples Giant. Photo: Luciano Pedicini.

they seem surprisingly more so when I view them anamorphically.

Pulling back and taking stock, I start to see patterns. The white-breasted woman and a hairy, bearded man both sprawl on the ground, stone dead, with right legs jerked up in pain, right arms outflung, and heads turned away from me (Figures 18–19). The legs of another echo theirs (Figure 20), and so do those of a fourth – more

or less (Figure 21). Several support themselves on one arm, hand flat on the ground. Two, kneeling, are mirror images of each other. And three more wear what looks comically like a “gangsta” cap (Figure 22).

Only then do I begin to think seriously about exactly who they are, to look for signs of identity, and to dredge my memory for parallels. The bearded dead man sports body hair and an animal skin: evidently a Giant. The



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FIGURE 20. Venice Dead Gaul. Photo: Osvaldo Böhm.



FIGURE 21. Side view of the Naples Persian. Photo: Luciano Pedicini.

white-breasted woman, wearing a short tunic and lying on a broken spear, can only be an Amazon. The three fellows with the caps should be Persians. Two wear trousers and slippers and one even has a scimitar, but why is the third stark naked except for his cap? And why does one of the clothed ones have a suspicious-looking bulge between his legs (see Figure 4)?

As to the others, one has a rope tied around his waist

and a long coffin-shaped shield: Definitely a Gaul (Figure 23). A second kneels on a similar shield and a third wears a distinctive helmet (Figure 24). But wait! His neck and torso don't join properly, and aha! – a crude iron clamp bites into his spine (Figure 25). Damn: another restoration. The rest are nondescript: Barbarians certainly, Gauls probably, but perhaps another Giant lurks among them.

It's time to hit the books.<sup>1</sup>

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FIGURE 22. Left side of the head of the Aix Persian. Photo: Centre Camille Jullian.



FIGURE 23. (right) Venice Dead Gaul. Photo: Osvaldo Böhm.

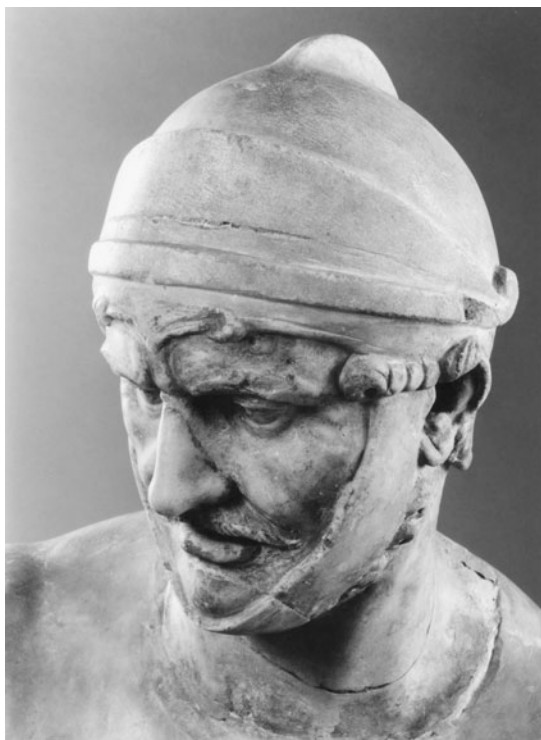


FIGURE 24. Head placed on the Naples Dying Gaul. Photo: Luciano Pedicini.



FIGURE 25. Head placed on the Naples Dying Gaul, back view. Photo: Luciano Pedicini.