

SARCOPHAGUS FRAGMENT WITH A QUADRIGA

ROMAN, 3RD CENTURY AD
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 53 CM.

WIDTH: 27 CM.

DEPTH: 10 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*IN THE COLLECTION OF NICOLAS
KOUTOULAKIS (1910-1996), PARIS.
THEN IN A PRIVATE COLLECTION,
ACQUIRED FROM THE PREVIOUS OWNER*

IN 1947.

*THEN IN THE COLLECTION OF
GALLERIST K. J. HEWETT (1919-1994),
LONDON, FROM AT LEAST 1963.
JAMES AND MARILYNN ALSDORF'S
COLLECTION, ILLINOIS, USA, ACQUIRED
FROM THE PREVIOUS OWNER IN 1964.*



This magnificent marble fragment, sculpted in relief, represents a quadriga. The chariot is sculpted from the front and was originally depicted drawn by four horses, but only three remain. The team is very richly harnessed, with thick leather straps and breastplates decorated with a pendant serving an apotropaic function, shaped like a half moon, called a *lunula*. The horses are wild, heads thrown back in recoil, mouths open, noses upturned, all of which lends a sense of great dynamism to the scene. Their manes are



delicately detailed with short curls, while their ears are perked up, capturing the alertness of the animals. The horses are drawing a large chariot represented from the front, conveying two draped figures. One of the two is wearing a toga, a thick woollen garment that was widely worn in the Empire by Roman citizens. The reins rest in front of the first figure, while the second is holding a rectangular box in his hands. At the horses' hooves is a kneeling figure, probably a charioteer, while a second is holding one of the animals by the reins.

Sculpted in white marble, our fragment has an original brown patina that lends it a unique aura, a testament to the stone's weathering of time.



This is a circus scene belonging to a larger whole that featured various key moments of chariot races. Under the Roman Empire,

sarcophagi were adorned with scenes illustrating the race itself, generally one of the bends with a fall and the victor parading with the palm of victory. This can be found on sarcophagi conserved at Palazzo Trinci in Italy and the British Museum in London (Ill. 1 - 2).



The section representing the fourth horse is currently conserved in a private collection and tells us a little more about the whole composition. The chariot was followed by two toga wearing magistrates, while the body of the charioteer whose head remains on our fragment looks hunched (Ill. 3).

Originating in the Etruscan and Greek cultures, circus games took on a particular importance with the Romans and became an essential part of citizens' daily lives. Gladiator and animal fights and, of course, chariot races regularly took place in circuses. The



teams of horses and participants were professionals divided into four teams that fuelled bets and whose confrontations very often had a political bearing. Sometimes fatal, these races were very successful and were widely represented in antique art. The games were preceded by a procession or sort of opening ceremony called *pompa circensis*, which gathered the competitors and their horses, musicians, dancers and important political personalities. The procession then headed towards the site of the games, traversing the whole city (Ill. 4).



Our sarcophagus fragment was in the collection of the famous Parisian art trader Nicolas Koutoulakis. Nephew of the gallerist Emmanuel Ségrédakis, he joined his uncle in Paris for his studies before working at his gallery a few years later. He then rubbed shoulders with many of the artists of the time including Picasso, Giacometti, Matisse and Cocteau. After going into exile during the war, he returned to Paris and took

over the Ségrédakis gallery at 4, rue de l'Échelle in the first arrondissement. He sold our fragment to a private collector in 1947, after which it was added to the inventory of another reputed trader from London, K. J. Hewett. He included the sculpture in his catalogue *Works of Art* published in 1963 (Ill. 5). The following year, the fragment was purchased by a couple of well-known American collectors, James and Marilynn Alsdorf (Ill. 6). Married in 1952, over the years and through their journeys to the four corners of the world, the Alsdorfs amassed a considerable collection of antique, Asian and contemporary artworks. Additionally, they played an active role in Chicago's cultural life and joined other collectors to found the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. The couple then lent our fragment for the *The Horse as Motif: 1200 BC-1966 AD* exhibition at the Arts Club of Chicago in 1975 and it was featured in the exhibition catalogue (Ill. 7).

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Relief with a race scene in the Circus Maximus in Rome, Roman, 3rd century AD, marble. Palazzo Trinci, Foligno.



Ill. 2. Sarcophagus fragment representing a chariot race, Roman, 3rd century AD, marble, L.: 115,50 cm. British Museum, London, inv. no. 1805.0703.134.





Ill. 3. Sarcophagus fragment with a circus scene, Roman, 3rd century AD, marble, H.: 38 cm. Private collection.

Ill. 4. *Pompa circensis*, Roman, 4th century AD, opus sectile. Palazzo Massimo, Rome.

Provenance:



Ill. 5. K. J. Hewett Ltd, Works of Art, 1963, no. 1.



Ill. 6. James and Marilynn Alsdorf, 1950.

Ill. 7. R. W. Shaw, *The Horse as Motif: 1200 BC - 1966 AD*, Chicago, 1975, pp. 8-9, no. II.

Publications:

- K. J. Hewett Ltd, *Works of Art*, 1963, no. I.
- R. W. Shaw, *The Horse as Motif: 1200 BC - 1966 AD*, Chicago, 1975, pp. 8-9, no. II.

Exhibition:

The Arts Club of Chicago, *The Horse as Motif: 1200 BC - 1966 AD*, 15 January - 22 February 1975.

