

RELIEF OF A RECLINING MAN

GREEK, HELLENISTIC, 2ND HALF OF THE 2ND CENTURY BC

MARBLE

RESTORATIONS FROM THE 17TH CENTURY

HEIGHT: 46 CM.

WIDTH: 52.5 CM.

DEPTH: 5 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*FORMER COLLECTION OF CARDINAL
JULES MAZARIN (1602-1661), PARIS AND
ROME.*

*FORMER COLLECTION OF THOMAS
HERBERT, 8TH EARL OF PEMBROKE (1656-
1733), WILTON HOUSE, WILTSHIRE.
PASSED DOWN BY DESCENT TO SIDNEY
HERBERT, 16TH EARL OF PEMBROKE
(1906-1969), WILTON HOUSE,
WILTSHIRE.*

*SOLD AT CHRISTIE'S, 3 JULY 1961, LOT 130.
IN THE PRIVATE COLLECTION OF JAN
MITCHELL (1913-2009), NEW YORK,
ACQUIRED THROUGH THE
ABOVEMENTIONED SALE.
THEN PASSED DOWN BY DESCENT.*



This magnificent fragment, sculpted in low relief, represents a bearded man reclining on a couch. The details of his face are finely etched: his eyes are wide open and delicately accentuated by thick eyelids. Above them, his arched eyebrows convey an expression of astonishment. His full lips are parted, as though he were mid-conversation. His face shows his maturity, framed, as it is, by unruly, thick, curly hair and a beard to match. He could be Zeus, king of the Olympian gods.

Leaning with his elbow on the table by the couch, left forearm resting on a thick cloth, his right arm is raised, a cup held in his hand. His torso is bare, revealing a muscled abdomen, while his himation is wrapped delicately around his waist and legs, passing behind his back. The man's torso displays superb proportions. It is solid, each muscle tensed. His pectorals and abdominals are subtly etched and salient, displaying a statuesque body. His rather shallow navel is finely incised, with two folds sculpted above it, accentuating his arched position. Each of the muscles of his arms and shoulders is tensed, while his horizontal right hand is holding a phiale – a libation bowl used for rituals in ancient Greece. He is lying down, his left leg resting on the *kline* – a couch used in ancient Greece – while his folded right leg is crossed over it. His himation hides his nudity while revealing his naked right foot.



The pleated fabric is rendered in a way that is both sensual and realistic, thanks to a play of folds of varying depths. The furniture in this scene is remarkably detailed. The *kline* is covered with a thick, soft-looking fabric that is embellished with elegant dangling tassels. Several ropes are twisted around its legs, the lower parts of which are shaped like lotus flowers, attesting to the sculptor's attention to detail. In front of the *kline* is a tripod table, the legs of which are shaped like panther legs, each claw individually sculpted in a clear attachment to realism. The edge of the round tabletop is decorated with a horizontal fluted pattern; on the table is a selection of food such as bread and a bunch of grapes.



The soft look of the man's skin, the great mastery over the use of the drill in the representation of his hair and beard, which creates a subtle play of light and shadow, and the particular attention paid to the décor and details making up this relief all attest to the

considerable expertise of the artist who crafted it. The beauty of this figurative fragment is magnified by a soft patina that has enhanced the surface of the marble over the centuries.

Sculpted in a fine-grained marble, this fragment once adorned a sarcophagus or a funerary stele. This particular representation refers to the *Totenmahl* or "Feast of the Dead", serving as both a funerary and a votive relief in classical antiquity. Such reliefs paid tribute to dead heroes and important members of society. The dead were often represented lying on a *kline*, surrounded by feasts and often deities, family members and animals – attributes that symbolised the status of the individual in society. Tripod tables, typical of Greek and then Roman antiquity, frequently feature in these representations, with an arrangement of food on the tabletop, symbolising a feast. Such funerary banquet scenes were commonly represented in antiquity. Spouses were frequently represented reclining together, celebrating the journey from life to death (Ill. 1–3). A very similar example is currently preserved at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles (Ill. 4). It depicts a man in a position similar to that depicted in our fragment, on a *kline* of the same type, covered by a cloth with dangling tassels that is identical to ours. Another representation of the *Totenmahl* is preserved in New York (Ill. 5).

In the 17th century, a sculptor restored our fragment and fitted it together with three other unrelated fragments: the figure of a standing Athena, from an acroterion, the

figure of a young girl carrying a dish, from a sarcophagus, and a gryphon in profile, from a relief, perhaps a representation of Nemesis, as she rode in a chariot drawn by gryphons. This grouping enabled the restorer to create a continuous scene depicting a reclining Zeus at a banquet, accompanied by Athena, standing on the left, and Hebe, attending him on the right, with his couch finished off by an ornamental sitting gryphon. This fragment, which once belonged to Cardinal Jules Mazarin, was documented in the inventory of the Palais Mazarin in 1653 and described as follows: "A bas-relief long crosswise, two palm leaves high or approximately, where we see a Jupiter seated near a round table loaded with various meats, holding a cup in hand and having at one side a Pallas and at the other a figure carrying a dish, all in white marble". A later drawing, made by Robert Castell in 1728, gives us an idea of the reinterpretation of the work as it could be viewed in the 17th century.



Robert Castell, *The Villas of the Ancient Illustrated*, London, 1728, p. 119. Illustration showing the current relief in its former restored state.

This exceptional fragment of a votive relief was thus first documented in the collection of Cardinal Mazarin (1602–1661), an Italian diplomat and politician who served the papacy and, later, the kings of France and who was also godfather to Louis XIV (Ill. 6). In 1643, upon the death of Louis XIII, Anne of Austria, who had been made regent, named him Chief Minister of State. In the same year, he took up residence in a Parisian palace in the 2nd *arrondissement* (currently the prints wing of the Bibliothèque nationale de France), which he rented and then purchased in 1649 (Ill. 7). It was in that private hotel that Mazarin set up his vast art collection – which included our relief – as well as his incipient library. A full inventory of his collection was drawn up a few years later. As a passionate collector and a man with a taste for art and opulence, he possessed a significant number of artworks, including many antiquities. He thus had whole crates of works sent to him from Rome. This Olympian *pasticcio* then passed smoothly from the Cardinal Mazarin's collection to that of the English statesman Thomas Herbert (Ill. 8), 8th Earl of Pembroke (1656–1733). The work

remained at Wilton House (Ill. 9), his family estate, for generations, until it was sold at Christie's as lot no. 130 on 3 July 1961. Probably shortly thereafter, a trader disassembled the relief and mounted the four fragments separately; at least three of them, including ours, were sold individually to Jan Mitchell (1913–2009) and added to his private collection in New York. Our fragment was then passed down by descent before finding its way to our collections.

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Votive relief with banquet scene, Greek, 4th century BC, marble, H.: 57.5 cm. Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, inv. no. 1999.011.003.



Ill. 2. Votive relief dedicated to a hero, Greek, late 4th century BC, marble, H.: 24 cm. The Met, New York, inv. no. 57.42.



Ill. 3. Funerary altar, Hellenistic, 2nd century BC, marble, H.: 60.96 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. no. 1851.0912.2.



Ill. 4. Relief with heroic banquet, Hellenistic, 2nd half of the 2nd century BC, marble, H.: 50.6 cm. The Getty Museum, Los Angeles, inv. no. 96.AA.167.



Ill. 5. Fragment of a relief with enthroned couple, Greek, 4th–3rd century BC, limestone, H.: 33 cm. The Met, New York, inv. no. 1996.151.1.

Provenance:



Ill. 6. Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602–1661), Portrait of the Cardinal Mazarin by the studio of Pierre Mignard (1658–1660), Chantilly, Musée Condé.



Ill. 7. Hôtel Tuboeuf, known as the Palais Mazarin, Rue des Petits Champs, Paris.



Ill. 8. Thomas Herbert, 8th Earl of Pembroke (1656–1733).



Ill. 9. Wilton House, Salisbury, United Kingdom.

Publications:

- 1653, Inventory of the Palais Mazarin in Paris: "A bas-relief long crosswise, two palm leaves high or approximately, where we see a Jupiter seated near a round table loaded with various meats, holding a cup in hand and having at one side a Pallas and at the other a figure carrying a dish, all in white marble" (from Orléans 1861).
- 1661, Inventory of the Palais Mazarin in Paris, no. 1482 (from Cosnac 1885, Yoshida-Takeda 2004).
- Robert Castell, *The Villas of the Ancients Illustrated*, London, 1728, p. 119, illus.
- James Kennedy, *A Description of the Antiquities and Curiosities in Wilton-House, Salisbury*, 1769, p. 105
- Richard Cowdry, *A Description of the Pictures, Statues, [...] at the Earl of Pembroke's House at Wilton*, London, 1751, p. 92.
- Thomas Martyn, *The English Connoisseur*, London, 1767, p. 120
- George Richardson, *Aedes Pembrochianae or a Critical Account of the Statues, Bustos, Relievos [...] at Wilton-House*, London, 1774, p. 110
- Henri Eugène Philippe Louis d'Orléans, Duke of Aumale, *Inventory of all the furniture of Cardinal Mazarin drawn up in 1653, and published from the original, preserved in the Archives de Condé*, London, 1861, p. 367, no. 123
- Adolf Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, Cambridge, 1882, p. 689, no. 85
- Comte de Cosnac, *The riches of the Palais Mazarin*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1885, pp. 371-372, no. 1482
- Patrick Michel, Mazarin, *Prince of collectors. The collections and furnishings of Jules Mazarin (1602-1661). History and Analysis*, Paris, 1999, p. 362
- Tomiko Yoshida-Takeda, *Inventory drawn up in 1661 after the death of Cardinal Mazarin*, Paris, 2004, p. 242, no. 1482
- Peter Stewart, *A Catalog of the Sculpture Collection at Wilton House*, Oxford, 2020, p. 406, no. 151.