

FRAGMENT OF A RELIEF WITH SILENUS

ROMAN, 2ND CENTURY AD
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 29 CM.

WIDTH: 24 CM.

DEPTH: 8 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*FORMER EUROPEAN PRIVATE
COLLECTION SINCE AT LEAST THE EARLY
20TH CENTURY (BASED ON THE STYLE OF
THE ORIGINAL CUSTOM-MADE WOOD
BASE, NOW REMOVED).*

*FORMER PRIVATE COLLECTION OF
NICOS DHIKÉOS (1896-1987), CONSUL OF
CYPRUS IN LYON, FRANCE, ACQUIRED IN
THE 1960S.*



The recognisable image of Silenus stands out in bas relief against this fragment of white marble. He is standing in three quarter view, right arm resting on a long stick as he carries a full wineskin on his left shoulder. He is looking far off in the distance. He is recognisable due to his stoutness, his happy old man's face, round all over, his flat nose, his bushy, knitted eyebrows and his long, full beard.

On his forehead rests a crown of vine branches, an attribute linking him to the Dionysian world.

All these details were rendered extremely finely by the Roman sculptor: the eyebrows are precisely carved, as are the eyelids, pupils and lachrymal caruncles. The contours of his cheeks stand out above his beard, the wavy strands of which are exquisitely wrought, through carving and drilling. In the same way, the bulk of the muscles in his arms is sculpted with great realism, giving the character his own spatiality, despite the fact he is sculpted in bas relief. The artist thus achieved a feat of delicacy on a relatively reduced surface.

The wineskin Silenus is carrying on his shoulder is an allusion to his taste for wine. In Graeco Roman mythology, Silenus is the adoptive father and preceptor of Dionysus,



god of wine. The fruit of the adulterous union between Zeus and the mortal Semele, the child was given to Silenus so he could protect him from Hera's rage. Silenus notably taught Dionysus how to plant vines. He accompanied him as one of his suite, in which he is traditionally represented drunk among the other satyrs and maenads, who support him on his intoxicated way (Ill. 1). A very popular subject in Graeco Roman iconography, there are representations of Silenus on objects as diverse as terracotta figurines (Ill. 2) and oil lamps (Ill. 3).



monumental sculpture of him holding the child Dionysus in his arms, attributed to the sculptor Lysippus or his school. The bronze original, executed in around 300 BC, is known to us through different Roman copies such as those at the Louvre (Ill. 4) and the Vatican Museums (Ill. 5). This work is emblematic of the sculptural renaissance

ushered in by Lysippus at the beginning of the Hellenistic period and is in line with antique baroque art. In our fragment of a relief, there are several of the characteristics of Lysippus' Silenus such as rather prominent muscles, particularly in the arms, a moving position that is rendered spatial and a special focus on details, with a very light, almost anecdotal aspect, as well as the great expressiveness of his face.



This Hellenistic taste for the baroque was revived in Roman art from the reign of the Emperor Hadrian. Our relief, dating back to the 2nd century, is a perfect example of this. It belonged to a larger piece, very likely the receptacle of a marble sarcophagus. Dionysian scenes were frequent subjects for the decoration of sarcophagi, particularly those representing the wedding of Dionysus and Ariadne. We can thus cite examples conserved at the British Museum (Ill. 7), in which Silenus is represented drunk on his



donkey, and the Glyptotek in Munich (Ill. 6), in which he is carrying a tray on his head, both in an expressive, detailed style reminiscent of that of our fragment.



Portrait of Nicos Dhikéos in front of Leonardo da Vinci's *Leda and the Swan*.

Our fragment belonged to Nicos Dhikéos' (1896-1987) collection. Born in Cyprus, he settled in France in 1916 and became an art trader, specialising in antique painting. He was the owner of the Galerie Saint François at 24 Rue Auguste Comte in Lyon. With his wife Dimitra, he amassed a sizeable collection of drawings, bought at auction or directly from collectors, which were dispersed before his death in 1987. He acquired this bas relief in the 1960s, but the style of the bespoke wooden base, now replaced, suggests that the piece was in private hands from at least the beginning of the 20th century.

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Borghese crater (detail): Silenus supported by Dionysus, Hellenistic, ca. 40-30 BC, based on a bronze original from the 4th century BC., marble, H.: 175 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. Ma 86.

Ill. 2. Figurine of Silenus, Roman, 1st century AD, terracotta, H.: 21.3 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. CA 3277 bis, exhibited at the Burgundy Wine Museum, Beaune.



Ill. 3. Oil lamp decorated with Silenus, Roman, Cyprus, ca. AD 40-100, terracotta, 10.6 cm. MET, New York, inv. no. 74.51.2115.

Ill. 4. Silenus carrying the child Dionysus, Roman, 1st-2nd century AD, based on a bronze original by Lysippus' school ca. 300-280 BC, marble, H.: 198 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. Ma 922.

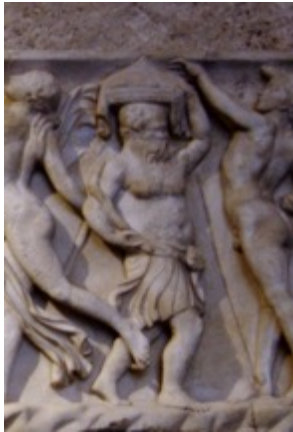


Ill. 5: Silenus carrying the child Dionysus, Roman, 1st century AD, based on a bronze original by Lysippus' school ca. 300-280 BC, marble, H.: 199.5 cm. Vatican Museums, inv. no. MV.2292.o.o.





Ill. 6. Sarcophagus representing Bacchus and Ariadne's nuptials, Roman, Antonine period, 2nd century AD, found in Rome, marble, 53,5 x 219,5 cm. British Museum, London, inv. no. 1805,0703.130.



Ill. 7. Front panel of a sarcophagus: Dionysus and Ariadne's nuptials in Naxos, Roman, AD 150 160, Glyptotek, Munich, Room 13.

