

# FRAGMENT OF A SARCOPHAGUS

ROMAN, 2<sup>ND</sup>-3<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY AD  
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 68.5 CM.

WIDTH: 91 CM.

DEPTH: 13 CM.

*PROVENANCE:*

*IN THE PRIVATE COLLECTION OF THE  
ITALIAN SCULPTOR  
VINCENZO CONSANI (1818-1888),  
FLORENCE, ACQUIRED IN ROME IN THE  
1860S.  
THEN IN THE FRENCH COLLECTION OF  
THE FAMOUS DOCTOR SAMUEL POZZI AT  
THE END OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY.  
SOLD AT GALERIE GEORGES PETIT,  
PARIS, "COLLECTION S. POZZI: ART  
ANTIQUÉ", 25-26 JUNE 1919, LOT 365.  
IN JEAN MIKAS' COLLECTION IN PARIS,  
ACQUIRED IN THE 1930S.  
THEN, PASSED DOWN TO HIS NEPHEW,  
GEORGE KRIMITSAS, BY SUCCESSION.  
SOLD AT CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK, AS PER  
THE "ANTIQUITIES" SALES CATALOGUE,  
ON 11 DECEMBER 2003, AS LOT 231.*



Sculpted in high relief in the manner of a frieze, this figurative fragment represents several moving characters. It was executed with a high degree of precision, in such a way that the first figure from the left can be identified as a satyr through its attributes. Standing with his left leg in front of the right, in a stance that is both elegant and proud, he is holding in his left hand a flute, which he is playing. His head is turned towards his instrument, while his right hand is raised and held in the same direction. His curly hair was sculpted with a chisel and his eye remains visible, despite the worn condition of the rest of his face. Nude and youthful, the satyr can also be identified through the animal skin draped over his left shoulder, which falls down his torso and clearly stands out from the background. His abdominals are prominent, his navel carved, his sex apparent and his thighs muscled. At his feet is a little cupid, also moving, heading towards the right. He is corpulent, in a stooped position, and laying his arm on a finely sculpted lion, the ferocious head of which was carefully depicted. The fur of our lion was sculpted with a chisel. The corners of its eyes are hollowed and folds can be glimpsed on its face, which, together with its open mouth, indicate that it is roaring. Its forelegs are extended towards the right. The sculptor sought to experiment with depth through a play of superposed planes in high and low relief: the lion's right paw, in high relief, completes the left paw, in low relief, thus creating an effect of depth. Another figure making up the scene is a bearded silenus, hunched over like an old man and wearing a *himation*, a sleeveless mantle worn by men



and women that could be wrapped or draped around the body in various ways. He is moving towards the right while turning his head towards the satyr. In his right hand, he is holding a thyrsus, a staff entwined in leaves, the attribute of the god Dionysus and the bacchantes. The drapery, wrought with care, stops at his calf and exhibits a play of folds animated by shadows and light. His foot is shod with a laced sandal. Although the figure of the silenus is represented in profile like the cupid and the lion, it still offers glimpses of features of his left profile, particularly the fold of his *himation*, visible against the background. The silenus is moving towards an elegant maenad, also moving, represented in the act of twisting around.



The maenad's head is turned to the left, towards the satyr, while the rest of her body and her arm face the other way. A partially visible fragment of her hand is still holding a hand drum, indicating her role in the scene. Her curly hair falls behind her while framing her face, which displays a slight smile. Her body is turned to the right. Her right leg is revealed by her ample *chiton*, which is cinched at her waist. From her waist flutters

a veil, which billows up to form a *velificatio* around her face, in line with how maenads are typically represented. Her posture, both flexible and as light as air, suggests a move that could be that of a dance, an impression that is further strengthened by the fluidity of the fabric and the flexed position of her leg.



On the ground between her feet is a theatre mask representing a satyr, with pointed ears and hollowed-out eyes. Finally, the last character of the composition is another young satyr. His face is in profile, ears pointed and jaw prominent. Shown from the back in a three-quarter view, his body is muscled and his back slightly hunched but powerful. His buttocks, round and well-shaped, are surmounted with a small tail. The upper part of his right thigh remains visible, as does his right foot, set on the ground. Further back is his left leg and part of an animal skin, which is draped over his left shoulder. Under our last figure is a goat, while, on the right, there are fragments of a tail, probably belonging to a panther or lioness.

Our whole relief is particularly well preserved, despite the few missing elements

and visible traces of erosion. The ancient patina is brownish and quite even. The sculptor had a very defined plastic sense. They were highly detail-oriented, conservative with their chisel and used superposed planes to give the effect of depth.



By its shape, the nature of the composition and the figures represented therein, our fragment unambiguously belongs to the typology of sarcophagi depicting the Dionysian procession. The joint presence of the music-playing satyr, the dancing maenad, the silenus, the lion, the cupid and the theatre mask, the emblem of the theatrical, Bacchic world, confirms that this frieze belongs to the Dionysian universe.

At the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, under the reign of Trajan (53–117), there was a major shift in Roman funerary practices. Inhumation gradually replaced cremation, leading to an unprecedented increase in the production of relief sarcophagi. The shift, first perceptible in Rome, denoted a new way of thinking about the body and remembering the deceased. From the first decades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, sarcophagi became objects of prestige, reserved for the elites, who chose to be buried in sculpted coffins, which were, in

turn, housed within funerary monuments. Roman workshops thus created sarcophagi and lids that were sculpted on three sides, as the back was set against the wall of a mausoleum. That schema differed from Greek and Anatolian models. Rome developed the art of the continuous frieze, in which characters followed one another in a rhythmic motion reminiscent of the theatrical stage. Among the favoured themes were Dionysian subjects, along with heroic or military scenes reserved for high dignitaries. Bacchic processions, inherited from Hellenistic models, were particularly popular in Roman funerary sculpture due to their multiple layers of symbolism. They signified the celebration of nature, the exaltation of pleasure and the promise of regeneration.



The first Dionysian representations appeared in around AD 120–130, during the reign of Hadrian, in compositions in which the god himself was often absent, but evoked by his retinue. From the Antonine period (in around AD 150–220), Dionysus took centre stage, especially in the famous compositions of the “Indian triumph” and “Discovery of Ariadne”. Our fragment, by its style, the

quality of its relief and the figures represented, is completely in line with that funerary art.



Close parallels can be drawn between our fragment and several major works preserved in great public collections, confirming that it is one of the Roman works of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, probably from the end of the Severan period. The Severan dynasty reigned between AD 193 and 235, during the High Roman Empire. A first comparison can be made with a sarcophagus fragment preserved at the Louvre (ill. 1), which represents a Bacchic procession. It has the same plastic qualities: deep relief work, a supple rendering of shapes and the continuous rhythm of the frieze. A second example, more complex in its composition, can be found within the Vatican Museums (ill. 2). It features a dancing maenad whose movement is almost identical to that of the maenad in our fragment, as well as a lion, an animal emblematic of the Dionysian procession.

The closest example is the sarcophagus fragment of the “Indian triumph” preserved at the Museo Gregoriano Profano in Rome

(ill. 3), dated to about AD 190. The work illustrates the myth of the “Indian triumph of Dionysus”, in which the god, having reached adulthood, left to conquer India at the head of an army of men and women bearing not weapons, but thyrsi and hand drums, instruments for festivities and celebrations. Inspired by the tales of Alexander the Great’s campaigns, the theme symbolises the victory of civilisation over barbarism and, more broadly, that of life and the mind over chaos. Our fragment reflects several elements characteristic of that iconography: the silenus and satyr adopt similar postures, while the billowing draperies of the maenads and the way they hold their hand drums underline the stylistic kinship. The presence of the lion behind the silenus, the goat in front of the satyr and the panther tail, here represented in its entirety, further emphasise their proximity. Another sarcophagus, almost intact, preserved at the Lugdunum Museum in Lyon (ill. 4), offers a finalised version of the same theme in the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Finally, a last example dating from AD 210–220, remarkable by the fineness of its sculpture, is currently preserved at the J. Paul Getty Museum (ill. 5).

Our superb fragment of a Roman sarcophagus is from the collection of the Italian sculptor Vincenzo Consani (1818–1888), a native of Lucca and a major figure of Florentine neoclassicism (ill. 6). Consani was a pupil of Luigi Pampaloni. He taught at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence and actively participated in public life, joining the Tuscan battalion as a volunteer in 1848. He was an esteemed artist, who sculpted the famous “Vittoria” (1867), currently preserved at the Pitti Palace. The fragment was likely acquired in Rome in 1860.

The work then entered the collection of Dr Samuel Pozzi (1846–1918), a Parisian doctor and collector (ill. 7). Pozzi was the founder of modern gynaecology, as well as a prominent figure in the intellectual and artistic world of his time. Following his

death, his collection was disseminated and sold at Galerie Georges Petit on 27 June 1919 (ill. 8). The catalogue mentions a “sarcophagus fragment from Nicopolis (Epirus)”. The mention of Nicopolis is consistent with the first archaeological discoveries made in that region in 1805. The traveller William Martin Leake visited the site on 24 June 1805 and, later, published a plan drawn by the architect Thomas Leverton Donaldson, which identified several ancient monuments. In the 1930s, the fragment was acquired by Jean Mikas, an antiquary of Greek descent who lived in Paris, before passing, by succession, to his nephew, George Krimitsas. It was finally sold at Christie’s in New York (*Antiquities*, 11 December 2003, lot 231). The sales catalogue (ill. 9) indicates that another part of the same sarcophagus – corresponding to the right part of our fragment – is preserved at the National Museum in Krakow. That fragment was illustrated in Friedrich Matz’s work (Ill. 10), which indicates that it was purchased in Rome in 1830 by the art trader Ignazio Vescovali on behalf of Count Arthur Potocki, whose collection was housed in the estate of Krzeszowice near Krakow. The second piece shows the sacrifice of a cockerel performed by an old woman, iconography that appears in other Dionysiac sarcophagi from the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (ill. 11 and 12).

### Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Sarcophagus fragment, Roman, 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, 150–160, marble, H.: 43 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. MND 1356.



Ill. 2. Sarcophagus façade with Dionysian thiasus, Roman, 2<sup>nd</sup> century, AD 170–180, marble, H.: 61.5 cm. Vatican Museums, inv. no. MV.1053.0.0.



Ill. 3. Sarcophagus representing the Indian triumph, Roman, end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, ca AD 190, marble, H.: 92 cm. Museo Gregoriano Profano, Vatican.



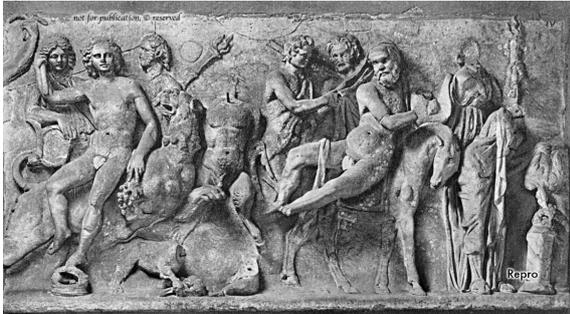
Ill. 4. Sarcophagus representing the Indian triumph, Roman, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, H.: 117 cm. Musée Lugdunum, Lyon, inv. no. 2001.0.305.



Ill. 5. Sarcophagus, Roman, AD 210–220, marble, H.: 60 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. no. 83.AA.275.

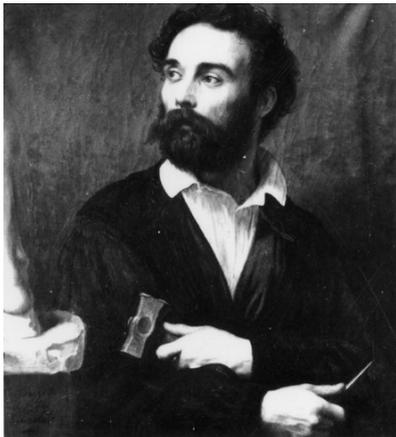


Ill. 11. Dionysiac sarcophagus, Roman, Antonine period, middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, marble, H.: 58 cm. Arachne ID 1178968.



Ill. 12. Dionysiac sarcophagus, Roman, Antonine period, end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, marble, H.: 71 cm. Vatican Museums, Palazzo Belvedere.

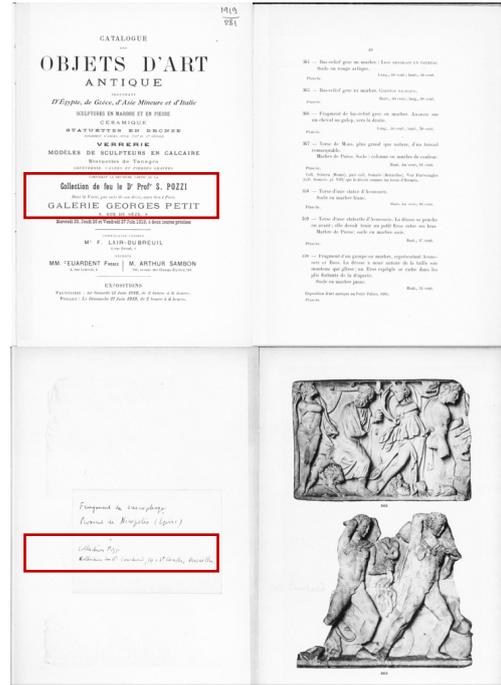
**Provenance:**



Ill. 6. Giuseppe Bezzuoli, Portrait of Vincenzo Consani, 1845, oil painting.



Ill. 7. Photograph of Samuel Pozzi (1846-1918).



Ill. 8. Sales catalogue entitled "Collection S. Pozzi: Art Antique", Galerie Georges Petit, June 1919, lot 365.



Ill. 9. Christie's *Antiquities* sales catalogue, 11 December 2003, New York, lot 231.

**Publication:**

F. Matz, "Die Dionysischen Sarkophage", Berlin, 1969, Pl. 186, Fig. 77.