

FRAGMENT OF A RELIEF REPRESENTING A GODDESS

GREEK, ATTIC, CIRCA 4TH CENTURY BC
MARBLE

HAUTEUR : 14 CM.

LARGEUR : 22 CM.

PROFONDEUR : 9,5 CM.

PROVENANCE :
FORMER FRENCH COLLECTION SINCE
AT LEAST THE 1940S, BASED ON THE
MOUNTING TECHNIQUES.
THEN FORMER PRIVATE COLLECTION IN
BURGUNDY, ACQUIRED IN AIX-EN-
PROVENCE IN THE 1980S.



This delicate face with its smiling gaze exudes an unrivalled gentleness and an air of gentle melancholy that can only be found in marble. Once part of a relief, our fragment

depicts the upper part of a face, probably that of a woman. The large, almond-shaped eyes, with their rimmed edges, surmounted by heavy eyelids and a straight, arched brow ridge, were probably painted, just like the rest of the fragment. This face is enhanced by a hairstyle consisting of long, intricately carved waves of hair, separated by a centre parting. The hair was no doubt gathered into a low bun, and a ribbon would have divided the head at the point where it is now broken.

The style of the face and the treatment of the hair possess an almost refined elegance, highlighting the stylistic hallmarks of the 4th century BC. More specifically, the style is Praxitelean; it is characterised, so to speak, by the supple modelling of youthful faces, heavy eyelids and a slightly downcast gaze. Praxiteles is undoubtedly the most renowned sculptor of the 4th century BC; he is particularly known for his creation of the Aphrodite of Cnidus (Fig. 1). Its fame also stems from the numerous reproductions and variations produced during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. As regards the face, two marble heads in the Louvre are considered to be the most faithful to the original Greek work: the 'Kauffmann Head' (Fig. 2) and the 'Borghese Head' (Fig. 3). The latter bears a striking resemblance to our fragment, particularly in the rendering of the locks of



hair, the triangular forehead and the slightly moist-looking eyes.



Although our fragment is stylistically similar to the Aphrodite of Cnidus, it nevertheless differs from it. The hairstyle, which is always associated with female figures, sometimes features a few variations, such as the addition of a veil or a diadem (figs. 5–7). In the absence of any attributes, it is difficult to identify the subject of this work with certainty.

The nature of the fragment is also unknown; it is not clear to which object it belonged. It was probably part of a votive or funerary stele, or of a sculpted relief on a temple. The precise dimensions of our fragment, its protruding reliefs and the quality of the modelling suggest that, like the Artemis from the Brauron relief (Ill. 4), it constituted a major element—probably the principal

element—of the relief to which it was attached; this lends credence to its presumed divine identity. Indeed, numerous examples of female heads from reliefs can be compared with our magnificent sculpture; this is notably the case with two works held at the MET in New York (Ill. 7–8). These are a head of Medea and a Bacchic head, the gaze of which is very similar to that in our relief. Similarly, the head known as the 'Barberini Suppliant', held in the same museum (ill. 9), displays facial features and a treatment of the hairstyle that are in every respect similar to our example.

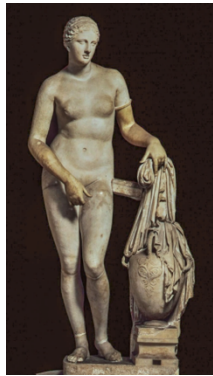


Carved from coarse-grained white marble, our fragment is a fine example of delicacy and perfect proportions. The interplay of light and shadow created by the detailed rendering of the strands of hair provides

further evidence of the craftsmanship of the Greek artists of the 4th century BC.

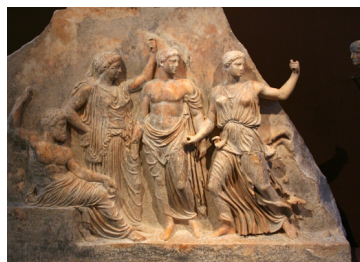
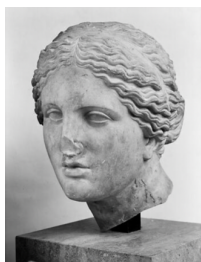
Formerly set in a wooden plinth typical of the 1940s, this graceful fragment belonged to a French collection. It was subsequently sold in Aix-en-Provence in the 1980s before joining a Burgundian collection, where it has remained to this day.

Comparatives :



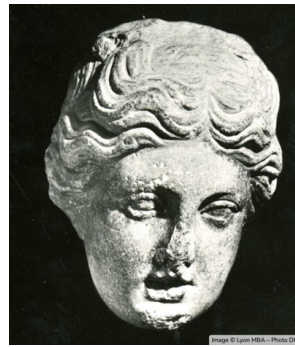
Ill. 1. Venus Colonna, a 2nd-century AD Roman replica of Praxiteles' 4th-century BC Aphrodite of Cnidus. Pio-Clementino Museum, Vatican (inv. 812).

Ill. 2. "Kauffmann Head", a 1st-century AD Roman replica of the face of Praxiteles' 4th-century BC Aphrodite of Cnidus. Paris, Musée du Louvre (inv. Ma 3518).



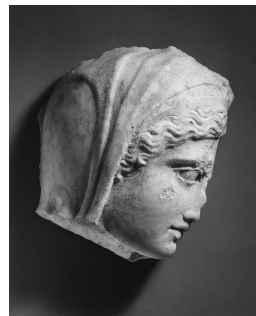
Ill. 3. 'Borghese Head', a Roman replica from the Imperial period of the face of the Aphrodite of Cnidus by Praxiteles, dating from the 4th century BC. Paris, Louvre Museum (inv. MR 675).

Ill. 4. : Relief of the gods from the sanctuary at Brauron depicting Zeus, Leto, Apollo and Artemis, marble, 5th century BC, Brauron Archaeological Museum.



Ill. 5. Head of a female deity (Juno?), Roman, 1st-2nd century AD, marble, height: 18.5 cm. Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. no. E 71-4.

Ill. 6. Head of a woman wearing a diadem, Roman, 1st-2nd century AD, marble, height: 15 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 23.160.5.



Ill. 7. Fragment of a relief depicting the head of Medea, Roman, 1st-2nd century, after an original Greek model dated to around 420-410 BC, marble, height: 16.5 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 23.160.86.

Ill. 8. Bas-relief: female Bacchic head, Roman, second half of the 2nd century AD, marble, height: 24 cm. Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. no. SN 402.



Ill. 9. Head known as the 'Barberini Suppliant', Roman, 1st century AD, after a Greek model dating from around 430-420 BC, marble, height: 26 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 18.145.54.