

COLNAGHI



*Sarcophagus Fragment
of a Lion Hunt*

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Roman

Imperial Period, 2nd century A.D.

Sarcophagus Fragment of a Lion Hunt

Marble

54 x 36 cm

21 1/4 x 14 1/8 in

Provenance

N.E. Collection, Worthing, United Kingdom, acquired before 1980;

By descent to previous owner.

The present fragment was once part of a large sculptural frieze that decorated one side of a sarcophagus. Marble sarcophagi became increasingly popular in the Roman Imperial Period among the Roman elite. Decorative friezes typically covered all four sides of a sarcophagus, with subjects widely variable, from mythological scenes to hunting friezes or even portraits of the deceased and their family members.

The lion hunt as a subject matter for funeral sculpture originates in Greek art. Often the deceased is depicted as one of the hunters, usually central to the scene, confronting a lion, often with several other hunters and animals surrounding them. These scenes are thought to exemplify the virtue and bravery of the deceased and can also be understood to glorify their life as a victorious battle over the wild, uncontrollable forces arrayed against them.

The man represented in the present fragment is a divine or heroic character, as indicated by his nudity. Without other figures or any identifying attributes, it is difficult to ascribe a particular identity to the figure, but in other reliefs where two nude men appear they have been supposed to be the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, a widely worshipped pair of half-human half-divine brothers from Greek mythology. At the right, one can see the head of a dying horse, presumably having been wounded by the lion, as well as a terrified hunting dog, cowering at the sight of the beast.

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