

COLNAGHI



*Sarcophagus Fragment
of a Rider on Horseback*

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Roman

Imperial Period, 2nd century A.D.

Sarcophagus Fragment of a Rider on Horseback

Marble

34 x 52 cm

13 3/8 x 20 1/2 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.

This evocative fragment depicts a rider on horseback, clothed in a short tunic, and armed with a sword whose hilt terminates in an eagle's head, while the horse's saddle is adorned in front with a clasp in the shape of a feline head. A hand, presumably one of the rider's, can be seen behind the horse at the right. This fragment likely comes from a battle scene, or potentially a beast hunt, both widely popular motifs across the Roman world. These programs have been interpreted to dramatize and mythologize the struggle of life and make sense of death as the end of that struggle.

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