

POMMEL IN THE FORM OF THREE STYLIZED ANIMALS

Sarmatian, 1st century B.C. - 1st century A.D.

Bitumen

D: 4.7 cm (1.85 in)

Reference: 16048



Possessing great dynamism and decorative detail, this pommel, which once most probably surmounted a staff, is an extraordinary example of Sarmatian gold work at its finest. Sarmatian art is often defined by the decidedly stylized treatment of animals depicted, as well as their subtle and successful incorporation into jewelry and other types of gold-work. Furthermore, Sarmatian gold-work often includes inlays of other materials, particularly turquoise, colored stones and glass, as seen here.

The interior of this finial has been filled with bitumen, most of which is preserved, no doubt adding weight to the piece, and to attach it to a staff or another object. The piece was hammered from a single sheet of gold, with additional details, particularly the space for the inlays, chased from the surface. Here, three quadrupeds (calves, sheep?) wrap themselves around one another, forming a circle as each follows the other in eternal movement. The spiral-like treatment of their woolly coats adds to the sense of fluidity and movement that the piece had. All are treated in nearly identical manner, with no intent to differentiate between the three. Their three heads frame a central piece of triangular dark glass.

Originally many parts of this pommel were inlaid, including the ears, coats, eyes and hooves of the animals, adding decorative details as well as value to the piece. This pommel was certainly part of a royal commission, as work of this level was no doubt reserved for the elite in Sarmatian society.

The Sarmatian tribes overtook the Scythians and their kingdom, invading their territory in the first century B.C. The Scythians occupied the steppes adjacent to the northern shores of the Black Sea. The Sarmatians carry on the infamous legacy of Scythian gold-work, including features such as stylized animals into their designs, but adding a flavor to the compositions that was inherently different.

CONDITION

Preserved entirely intact, with the exception of missing inlays; soil and bitumen deposits in places.

PROVENANCE

Ex-Jean Pierre de Chambrier, Baron d'Oleyres, private collection, Switzerland; acquired in the 1960s.

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