

SARCOPHAGUS OF THE THREE SHEPHERDS

Artist: Unknown
Date: 4th Century AD
Dimensions: 72 x 223 x 112 cm
Material: Marble
Inventory Number: 31554

Total Cost: € 11.170,00

RESTORATION PROCESS INCLUDES:
A thorough cleaning of this sarcophagus will recover the original splendor of its white marble which is currently blackened by dirt and weathered paint.

RESTORATION PROCESS INCLUDES:
- Removal of dust
- Consolidation of cracks and gaps
- Complete overall cleaning
- Scientific research
- Photographic documentation

The Sarcophagus of the Three Shepherds is a masterpiece of ancient sculpture and one of the most valuable sarcophagi in the Pio-Christian Museum. This piece was made under the Roman Emperor Theodosius in the last quarter of the 4th century AD.

During the 4th century, the reliefs found on sarcophagi were typically characterized by triumphal biblical scenes like the Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem or the Crossing of the Red Sea to stress the importance of the victory of the Christian faith over paganism, a victory sealed by the edict of Theodosius. Our sarcophagus is different, however. This tomb appears to have been completed following older iconographic models, employing more traditional motifs such as cupids gathering grapes or the repeated character of the shepherd whose image was widely used on both pagan and Christian sarcophagi in the 3rd century when Christianity was just beginning to evolve.

Scholars are now discussing whether these older figurative motifs are the signs of a pagan client or whether the sarcophagus was commissioned by a wealthy Christian who wanted to employ ancient motifs with the same intentions as the Christian Imperial Court only a few decades earlier. This can be seen in the mosaics of St. Constance dating back to mid 4th century, decorated with several cupids gathering grapes.

The quality of this piece's imagery and depth is remarkable. The reliefs appear embroidered into the marble while the figures seem to detach themselves from the surface, creating a lively chiaroscuro effect in the background.

