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ROMAN

RIGHT FOOT FROM A STATUE

2ND CENTURY A.D.

Bronze

21.5 x 29 x 10.5 cm

Provenance:

Axel Guttman (1944-2001) Collection, Berlin, Germany;

Christie's London, 28 April 2004, lot 132;

Private Collection, United Kingdom (acquired in 2004).

Comparative Literature:

F. Ryan, *Rank and Participation in the Republican Senate*, Stuttgart, 1998, pp. 55-59.

J. L. Sebesta and L. Bonfante (eds.), *The World of Roman Costume*, Wisconsin, 2001, pp. 116-120.

C.P. Presicce and A.S. Mura, *The Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius in Campidoglio*, Milan, 1990,
and M. Albertoni and M. Cima, *The Capitoline Museums*, Rome, 2000, p. 41.

C.C. Mattusch, *The Fire of Hephaistos: Large Classical Bronzes from North American Collections*,
Cambridge, 1996.

For the *flamines* on the *Ara Pacis*, see O. Rossini, *Ara Pacis*, Rome, 2007, p. 62.

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Etiquette prescribed that when a Roman citizen went out in the city he should wear a *toga* and *calcei* (shoes entirely encasing the foot), as opposed to the tunic and sandals, which were confined to indoor use. The enclosed shoe, as depicted in the present piece, was a distinctly Roman contribution to ancient footwear, and, together, the *calceus* and the *toga* formed the two peculiarly national features of Roman costume. They were immediately recognizable as symbols of power enjoyed by the citizens of the Roman Empire. The present right foot once formed part of an over life-sized bronze sculpture of an emperor or important member of the elite. It is significant not only because it attests to the extraordinary ability of the Roman sculptor in creating large scale works of art, and the rarity of surviving bronze works, but because the element preserved is precisely the part that tells us most about the individual represented, since certain differences of rank were marked by different kinds of footwear.

The shoe can be identified as either the *calceus patricius* or the *calceus senatorius*. Both comprise a closed boot with a sole and upper, featuring four leather straps (*corrighiae*) that were wrapped around the ankle and leg, and passed under the instep (these are the two straps that appear across the top of the foot in the present piece). The straps around the ankle were tied at the front in knots and the ends left to dangle decoratively, as here. The differences between the two types are not easy to determine, but it is thought that the *patricius* was dyed a red colour, hence the alternative name *calceus mulleus*, after the expensive red fish, whilst the *senatorius* may have been red or black. Contemporary literature also describes how a small ivory crescent known as a *lunula* was sometimes affixed to the *calceus patricius* as a further distinguisher of rank.

Another obvious difference concerned who was permitted to wear each type, a fact not as clear-cut as the names suggest. Though they were named *calcei patricii*, these shoes were not worn by all patricians or patrician senators, nor were they confined to patricians only. Formerly, they were the official insignia of the Kings of Alba, a group of legendary kings who ruled Italy before the founding of Rome by Romulus; then of the Roman kings; and later of the patrician class, who were descended from the first 100 men appointed as senators by Romulus. When the curule (patrician) magistracies were opened up to the plebeians, the latter obtained the right of wearing the patrician insignia, and thus of wearing the *calceus patricius*. In late Republican and Imperial Rome, they were generally worn by these curule magistrates on special public occasions only, such as triumphal processions and temple dedications. Cassius Dio, for example, records that Julius Caesar wore *calcei patricii* when celebrating his victories in Rome. The *calceus senatorius*, the boot of ordinary senators who had not yet sat in curule office, was worn when the senator appeared in public, especially at sittings of the senate. An extract from the Emperor Diocletian's Price Edict of AD 301 confirms the difference in intended status and/or quality of the shoe types, since at this time *calcei patricii* were priced at 150 denarii per pair, *calcei senatorii* at 100 a pair, and the *calcei equestres* even cheaper at 70 denarii per pair.

The choice of shoes therefore informs us that the person represented in the full sculpture was someone of the highest rank, as well as indicating that the work must have been designed to portray the subject in a triumphal context, and/or to emphasise his high birth. Footwear was key in expressing the intended projected message. In the Prima Porta statue of Augustus, for example, the first emperor is depicted barefoot, to emphasize his alleged divine ancestry, since most male deities were depicted barefoot. If an emperor wished to emphasize his military side, he would most likely be depicted

wearing the military sandal, the *caligae*, for example, the bronze statue of the Emperor Trebonius Gallus (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 05.30, AD 251-253), in which the emperor is nude save for his shoes. Regarding the present piece, the sole of the foot is flat to the ground, indicating that the weight of the body was borne on the right leg. It may also have belonged to an imperial equestrian statue, since several examples depict the mounted emperor wearing this type of shoe, for example, the famous equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180) in the Capitoline Museum, and on those of Balbus and his son, and that of Domitian or Nerva, in the Naples Archaeological Museum. Apart from imperial images, this footwear is also seen on, for instance, the bronze statue of an orator, circa 100 BC, in The National Archaeological Museum in Florence; on the *flamines* (priests) on the *Ara Pacis* (13 -9 BC); and even on a statue of the god Serapis, in the Musée du Louvre (BR 511 inv no. MNC 701). The continued popularity of *calcei* from Republican times until the late empire indicates a consistency in the importance ascribed to ritual footwear.

Finally, it is important to note that the piece is rendered in bronze, rather than marble. Whilst bronze was the most popular medium in the ancient world, due to its light and malleable properties, allowing artists to create detailed and naturalistically rendered figures, original bronze statues are now exceptionally rare, more so than marble. This is because the intrinsic value of bronze as a material was so great in the post-antique world that the vast majority of statues were melted down for reuse as weapons, tools, objects, and implements. This means that pieces preserved from large-scale figures, such as the present, are all the more significant. In addition, the level of detail apparent in the careful rendering of the leather straps would have been much easier to achieve in marble, as these features could have been painted on to a more rudimentary carving of the basic structure of the shoe. The fact that a highly skilled artisan was commissioned to execute this work in cast bronze again speaks to the wealth and importance of the patron. This detailed glimpse into the life of the subject, through his shoes, intrigues and entices the viewer to envisage the whole statue in all its regal splendour.