

Ibex Frieze
3rd to 1st Century B.C.

Yemen

Alabaster

20.8 x 49.5 x 6.5 cm

Twelve stylised ibex heads, elongated and carved in relief. With globular eyes and long ears and horns. Flanked by two architecturally suggestive rectangular panels with indented niches.

The ibex, a common form of wild goat, was the most widely represented animal in southwestern Arabian art. Ritual ibex hunts were an important feature of the cult practices of the southwestern Arabian kingdoms, and successfully capturing and killing these elusive creatures was believed to secure favours from the gods. Ibex skulls and horns were also used as architectural decorations on the upper corners of houses, where they are still occasionally found today.

A similar frieze, depicting nine stylised ibex heads, is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, where it is catalogued as a fragment of a grave stele.