The Indian Triumph of Dionysus
Unknown Roman

Roman, Roman Empire, 180-195 AD
Marble, Overall: 34 1/2 x 85 3/4 x 9 1/2 in.  
(87.6 x 217.8 x 24.1 cm)

Museum purchase funded by Lee and Joe Jamail in honor of Caroline Wiess Law

This white marble panel, commissioned by a wealthy Roman follower of the mystery cult of Dionysus, depicts the god's triumphant return after spreading the miracle of wine culture to India and the East. At the composition's center, Dionysus is identified by his headdress of grapes and grape leaves. His languorous pose and relaxed state of undress suggest sensuality.

Around him, graceful female celebrants called maenads dance and play music. Satyrs, male followers with both human and animal characteristics, try to interest the maenads. The old satyr, Silenus, rides a donkey beside Pan, a forest creature who looks back at Dionysus. Young cherubs caress the feet of Dionysus and guide the panthers pulling his cart. Captives taken in India ride on an exotic elephant at the rear of the parade.

A masterpiece of high-relief sculpture, this panel would have formed the front of a sarcophagus, a magnificent place of final rest. It measures about seven feet long and three feet high.

Online Resources:
Hirsch Library Online Catalog
The Metropolitan Museum of Art Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Articles: (full-text access available on-site; off-site access available through your school library or Houston Public Library)

Print Resources:
Myth, Meaning, and Memory on Roman Sarcophagi
Life, Death and Representation
Living with Myths: The Imagery of Roman Sarcophagi
Dionysos at Large
Classical Art: From Greece to Rome
Bibliography

General Surveys of Ancient Egyptian Art


Roman Stone Sarcophagi


Roman Art, History, and Culture


Dionysus


This reference guide is just the tip of the iceberg on helpful resources in the library's holdings. Many of the suggested resources above have their own bibliographies. Each of these may lead you to other resources that would also be helpful in your research here in the museum or in another library. To find additional resources, use keywords such as “Dionysus” and “Sarcophagi” in the on-line catalog and periodical indexes. Once you find a few relevant titles, pay attention to the subject headings to identify similar materials. Examples of useful subject headings are:

- Relief (Sculpture), Roman
- Art and society--Rome
- Art, Roman

For guidelines about writing it may be helpful to look at Sylvan Barnet's *A Short Guide to Writing about Art*, which includes tips for looking, reading, and writing about art. Ask for it at the reference desk. At every stage of your work, please allow the library staff to help you. We can be reached at 713-639-7325 or hirsch@mfah.org