

Sample Art Research Paper

Writing About Art

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APPENDIX IV: The Final Paper

After another trip to the Metropolitan to look at the sarcophagus again and another round of revisions, the student turned in this paper. How is it different from the first draft? What has been added? Underline the topic sentences! Do they make sense as an outline?

"The Severan Endymion Sarcophagus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art"

The Endymion Sarcophagus (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 47.100.4), a marble coffin created between 200-220 CE during the Roman Severan period, is decorated with scenes from classical mythology about love and immortality. Shaped like a tub, the sarcophagus is in the form known as *lenos* that looks like the container in which grapes were pressed. Such containers also had two lion's heads on the front, just as this sarcophagus does.¹ The body is about 73 inches long, 20 inches tall, and about 16 inches at the base of the end, increasing to about 23 inches at the top. A row of standing panels along the front edge of a flat marble lid adds approximately eight inches. The major story, shown on the long front of the sarcophagus and in a scene on one of the panels, is the myth of Endymion and Selene. It is found on more than 70 Roman sarcophagi from the 2nd and 3rd centuries.² The subject may have been popular because of the association between sleep and death, and the idea of the gods granting mortals an eternal happy life in the heavens after death.³ The sarcophagus, which was found in a chamber tomb located in Ostia, Italy, in 1825, was bought by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1947.⁴

Carved figures and animals cover the two long sides as well as the ends of the sarcophagus. The most important side, carved in very deep relief, shows the goddess of the moon Selene coming to the sleeping Endymion.⁵ The entire scene, which includes the horses of Selene's chariot and other figures, is bracketed on either side by a large lion's head. The back, carved in low relief so that the sarcophagus can be pushed against the wall, shows a pastoral scene with two men, bulls, sheep, horses, and two nymphs.⁶ The short, curved ends show the sun god Helios on the left and Selene on the right, both in

their chariots. The lid of the sarcophagus is bare except for the front, which is ornamented with five upright arched panels on either side of a nearly square panel which contains the dedication. Scenes showing mythological scenes as well as a portrait of the deceased, carved in low relief, fill the panels.

The story of Selene and Endymion is about love between a goddess and a mortal man. Selene fell in love with Endymion, a beautiful young shepherd, when she happened to see him asleep in a grotto on Mount Latmos. She visited him for many nights, until finally he was given eternal youth and put him into an eternal sleep.⁷ Then they could be together forever. The main scene on the front of the sarcophagus depicts Selene leaving her chariot to visit Endymion while he sleeps. Cupids holding torches around her and the presence of her chariot indicate that it is nighttime. In a small panel above, Selene and Endymion are shown again, together and awake. The goddess is shown once more, on the rounded end to the right of the main scene, leaving in her chariot.

The sarcophagus contains another story of love between a god and a mortal with meetings at night, the myth of Psyche and Cupid. They are represented as small figures under the lion's head on the left side of the front, and in one of the arched panels. Cupid, the god of love, is the son of Venus, goddess of love and beauty. Psyche is an extremely beautiful mortal woman, of whom Venus is jealous. Venus sends Cupid to cause Psyche to fall in love with someone ugly, but instead he falls in love with her himself. He hides her in a beautiful palace, where he visits her every night in darkness, so she doesn't know who he is. Finally Psyche hides a lamp which she uses to look at him after he has fallen asleep. She discovers that her lover is a beautiful young man, but she also allows oil from the lamp to fall on him, which wakes him. He escapes, and goes to his mother Venus. Psyche, to avoid Venus's rage, appeals to her for forgiveness. Venus then gives Psyche a series of impossible tasks. Eventually, Cupid convinces Jupiter to plead their case to Venus. Jupiter succeeds, and Psyche becomes immortal and marries Cupid.⁸

Despite the number of elements contained in these scenes, the major characters on the front of the sarcophagus are easily identifiable. Almost in the center of the composition is a woman who is emphasized by her placement in the middle, her height, around one and a half feet tall, which fills the height of the sarcophagus, and the rounded shape of the veil she holds above her head. She is the moon goddess Selene, identified by the crescent moon she has on her head, stepping out of a chariot pulled by

two rearing horses facing to the left. Further visual emphasis comes from the many folds of her full-length dress, which is gathered above her waist and falls off her right shoulder, leaving her right breast uncovered. Although her upper body faces us, her legs and her head are turned to the right, drawing our attention to an almost nude man who lies stretched out along more than a third of the width of the front. He rests on his left elbow and holds his right arm bent behind his head, in a classical Greek position of sleep.⁹ Although his body faces us, his head is turned away, shown nearly in profile, and his eyes are closed. Standing above him is a winged, robed female figure who is the goddess Night. She is holding a stalk of poppy seed pods in her left arm and pouring a sleeping potion made from them out of a drinking horn in her right hand. Surrounding these figures are six small nude winged boys or cupids, three on each side of Selene. Four of them hold torches to light Endymion, and two hold the reins of Selene's horses.¹⁰

The figures on the left side of the front of the sarcophagus are not directly related to the story of Selene and Endymion. To the left of the two rearing horses is a female figure, probably Aura, personification of the breeze, who holds the reins in her raised left hand and a whip in her right. Beneath the horses is a much smaller reclining female figure, who holds a snake in her hand as she looks toward Endymion. She represents Earth.¹¹ Sitting on the ground directly to the left of these two women is a bearded man, who is turned to face Selene. He looks down at a dog which sits in front of him, while he scratches under its head. Above him, lying on a projecting ledge that may represent a cave, lie two sheep facing a goat.¹² Next to him is a kid goat. Under the head of the lion on the left, next to the shepherd, are Cupid and Psyche, shown as two small winged figures embracing one another.

Beyond the lion heads, carved on the rounded ends of the sarcophagus, are the figures of Helios and Selene. The sun god Helios is to the left of the main scene, shown as a nude man wearing a billowing cape and a crown made of rays, who stands in a chariot drawn by four horses. Next to him is a winged cupid holding a flaming torch. He represents the rising morning star. Beneath them is a reclining man who symbolizes the Ocean. Selene is shown on the other end, depicted with the same attributes as she has on the front. Standing in a chariot drawn by two horses, moving away from Endymion, she has the same curved veil over her head, the same crescent on her head, and the same full-length dress which falls to expose her right breast. In front of her is a descending cupid with a torch, representing the setting evening star. This figure has been badly

damaged. Beneath the horses is a reclining female figure who personifies Earth.¹³ In front of the chariot, holding the reins and a whip, is the same winged woman who appears with the chariot on the front of the sarcophagus.

Every area on the front and ends of the sarcophagus is packed with figures, animals, and natural elements, piled around one another without being located in a single coherent space. For example, Selene's left foot appears between Endymion's legs, and the figure of Earth lies between the back legs of the horses pulling the chariot. Some parts have been carved so deeply that they stand out from the marble entirely, only connected by a small link needed to support them. This is true of figures, like the cupids, as well as the animals and plants. Looked at from the front, this creates a very active visual play of light and shadow. Selene's profile, for example, stands out against the darkness of the shadow cast by her veil. Looked at from the side, the sarcophagus seems to be covered with heads that pop out from the surface. The carving also describes very small naturalistic details, like the finger and toenails shown on many of the figures, the differently shaped and textured horns of the sheep and the goat, and the seedpods of the poppies. This creates a visual richness that gilding of the details would have increased dramatically.¹⁴

The back depicts a pastoral scene carved in low relief. On the left, next to the woman holding the reins to Selene's chariot, is an older bearded man, who reclines, leaning on his right elbow with his left hand above his head. Unlike Endymion, who has a similar position, this man is clothed, awake, and turned to the left, as if looking at Selene in her chariot shown on the end. Behind him and to the right are three large bulls with a sheep above them. In the center, between two trees, are two grazing horses. Another horse faces them. In front of it is a standing bearded man who looks to the left, while he scratches the head of a dog seated next to him. Both men wear a short robe that ends above their knees. To the right of this man, only partly visible from the back because of the rounded corner of the sarcophagus, are two standing women. One of them is almost nude, and she holds a jar from which water flows. They are nymphs.¹⁵

On the front and center of the lid is a nearly square panel with an inscription which reads:

“ANINIA HILARA / CL · ARRIAE MARI / · INCONPARABILE / FECTT · VIXIT · /
ANN · L · MEN / · X”

This means that the sarcophagus was created for a woman named Claudia Arria,

called mother and incomparable, who lived for fifty years and ten months. Her daughter, Aninia Hilaria, whose name comes first in the inscription, dedicated the sarcophagus. The fact that this extensively carved marble sarcophagus was bought by the daughter, not a man in the family, is very unusual.¹⁶ Funerary inscriptions from daughters to mothers make up only three percent of all the dedications known today.¹⁷ The inscription is not well spaced within the panel. The letters run onto the border on the right, the last line consists of only the last letter, and the lines are crooked.

A bust portrait of the dead woman, Claudia Arria, appears in the panel to the right of the inscription.¹⁸ She faces us, robed, with her arms crossed and her right hand held flat against her chest. She has large eyes with incised pupils, a long nose, and a serious expression. Her hairstyle of waves on either side of her face helps date the work, because this style was made popular by Empress Julia Domina (193 - 211 C.E.), wife of Septimius Severus.¹⁹ The carving seems less skillful than it is on the rest of the sarcophagus. She is not quite in the center of the panel, so that her arm hits its right edge and the shoulder above it is longer than her other one. In addition, her head does not quite sit above her body.

The scenes in the arched panels on the lid are arranged so that the ones in the same positions on either side seem to be related. On both the far left and far right, male figures representing mountain gods are seated within a landscape, indicated by trees and animals.²⁰ The next panels toward the center depict winged nude boys with fruits and animals, symbolizing Autumn on the left and Spring on the right, and the bounty of the earth. The next panel on the left shows Cupid turning his face away from Psyche and holding up his right hand as if to say no, while Psyche reaches out as if to pull him around to face her.²¹ The equivalent panel on the right shows the goddess Venus, seated in a landscape with one cupid behind her and another at her knees. A third small figure, lying on the ground in the lower left corner of the panel with arms stretched out, has the same wings and dress as Psyche. Perhaps it shows the moment when Psyche pleads for Venus's forgiveness. The next panel on the left depicts a nude man wearing a helmet, with a sword in its case at his waist, carrying a spear and shield. He is Mars, god of war and Venus's lover. The equivalent panel on the right shows a standing nude woman, perhaps Venus, holding an apple in her right hand and a spear in her left. There are cupids around her, one of whom holds what seems to be a fruit up to her. The fifth and last panel on the left side, corresponding to the portrait of the dead woman on the right,

shows a seated nude man facing a seated woman dressed in a flowing robe. A crescent on her head identifies her as Selene. The man is Endymion, awake, with a crescent on his head also, indicating that he is now immortal and in heaven. Selene reaches out to turn his head toward hers, while two cupids watch the scene.

The Endymion sarcophagus probably was made in a workshop based in Rome, although the marble might have come from Greece.²² The inscription was added after it was purchased, which explains the awkwardness of the placing and formation of the letters compared to the finer quality of the sculpture. The portrait of the deceased was also finished after the sarcophagus had been bought. The generalized costume and gesture could suit anyone, and tool marks around the head show the rough form from which the portrait was created.²³

Considering the composition as if the portrait of the dead woman is the most important element makes it clear how many ways she has been related to Selene and to love. The moon goddess approaching Endymion is immediately below her bust. The panel that corresponds to her portrait, on the other side of the inscription, shows Selene and Endymion together and immortal. This may be the only surviving representation where they appear this way.²⁴ On the other side of the portrait are two depictions of Venus. Finally, Cupid and Psyche appear together twice, and small cupids are everywhere. The repetition of the theme of love suggests it was important to the way her daughter wanted her mother to be remembered.²⁵

Another Endymion sarcophagus (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 24.97.13), from around 160 CE, includes almost the same basic elements as the one from the early third century, but they are handled very differently. Selene, nearly in the middle of the composition, walks from her two-horse chariot toward a sleeping Endymion. Here too she is encircled by a billowing veil and she has a crescent on her head. Her full-length dress also falls to exposes her right breast. There are small cupids on either side of her. A winged female figure, looking very much like the one in the later version and also identified as Aura, holds the reins of the horses. It is a man not a woman, however, who holds a poppy stalk and stands behind Endymion. He is Somnus, the god of sleep.²⁶ Standing cupids, leaning on upside-down torches and asleep, bracket the scene. The carving is less deep, so there is no dramatic play of light and shadow, and there are many fewer visual elements. Everyone seems to move at a steady pace, making the composition visually calmer. The carving also does not extend around the ends, which

have shallow reliefs showing a griffin on each side. There is no carving at all on the back or the lid.

The popularity of the myth of Selene and Endymion on Roman sarcophagi may come from the variety of ways in which it can be related to the idea of death and a peaceful afterlife. Endymion can symbolize the dead person, sleeping until awoken to be with the gods. The practice of carving the face of one of the mythological figures on a sarcophagi with the features of the deceased supports this identification between the two.²⁷ It may have been inappropriate to do that in this case because Claudia Arrias was a woman, or her daughter may have decided that it cost too much to make the additional changes. The pastoral scenes can suggest the tranquility that comes after death. Finally, the figures of the seasons as well as those of the moon and sun represent the endless cycles of nature. All of these themes have been represented clearly in the Endymion sarcophagus from the early 3rd century in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum.

Notes

1. Heather T. Awan, "Roman Sarcophagi," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–). http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rsar/hd_rsar.htm (accessed November 26, 2008).
2. Jean Sorabella, "A Roman Sarcophagus and Its Patron," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 36 (2001): 70.
3. Sorabella, 71; and Awan.
4. Sorabella, 70; and Metropolitan Museum of Art wall label.
5. Friedrich Matz, "An Endymion Sarcophagus Rediscovered," *The Metropolitan Museum Art Bulletin, New Series*, 15 (Jan. 1957): 123. Unless otherwise indicated, the subsequent identification of the figures on the sarcophagus is taken from this page.
6. Awan.
7. Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 6th ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42.
8. Morford, 136-8.
9. Anna Marguerite McCann, *Roman Sarcophagi in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), 39.
10. Matz, 123.
11. McCann, 42.

12. The identification of the ledge as part of a cave in which the shepherd sits comes from the discussion of the same elements in another Endymion sarcophagus in Gisela Richter, "A Roman Sarcophagus," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 20, no. 3 (March 1925): 80.

13. Matz, 123.

14. McCann, 22.

15. Matz, 123.

16. Sorabella, 67.

17. Sorabella, 79, note 7.

18. "Endymion sarcophagus [Roman] (47.100.4)" in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–). http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rsar/ho_47.100.4.htm (accessed November 30, 2008).

19. Matz, 127.

20. Matz, 123. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent identifications of the figures come from this page.

21. Matz, 127. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent identifications of the figures come from this page

22. Awan; and McCann, 37.

23. Sorabella, 77.

24. McCann, 43.

25. Sorabella, 76.

26. Richter, 78.

27. Sorabella, 77.

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Awan, Heather T. "Roman Sarcophagi". In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rsar/hd_rsar.htm (accessed November 26, 2008)

"Endymion sarcophagus [Roman] (47.100.4)". In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rsar/ho_47.100.4.htm (accessed November 30, 2008)

Matz, Friedrich. "An Endymion Sarcophagus Rediscovered." *The Metropolitan Museum Art Bulletin*, n.s. 15, no. 5 (January 1957): 123-128.

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Richter, Gisela. "A Roman Sarcophagus." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 20, no. 3 (March 1925): 77-80.

Sorabella, Jean. "A Roman Sarcophagus and Its Patron." *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 36 (2001): 67-81.

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