

Objects in Focus

The Pashley Sarcophagus c.101 -200AD



The Pashley sarcophagus is a marble funerary coffin for a wealthy Roman citizen. It was made in Rome and was found on the island of Crete in the early 19th century.

The deep carved relief shows a **triumphal return of Dionysus, the god of wine**. Dionysus returned from India, having 'civilised' the East with the gift of the grape. Dionysiac scenes evoke feelings of celebration, and release from the cares of this world.

Dionysus, wearing a panther skin, is shown standing in a chariot. He is depicted as a youth. His head is crowned with an ivy wreath.

He is accompanied by a procession of human and semi-human revellers.



Revellers on the sarcophagus include ...

Maenad, a female follower of Dionysus

Centaur, semi-human creatures with the bodies and legs of horses

Pan, the loud and mischievous god- he holds a tambourine



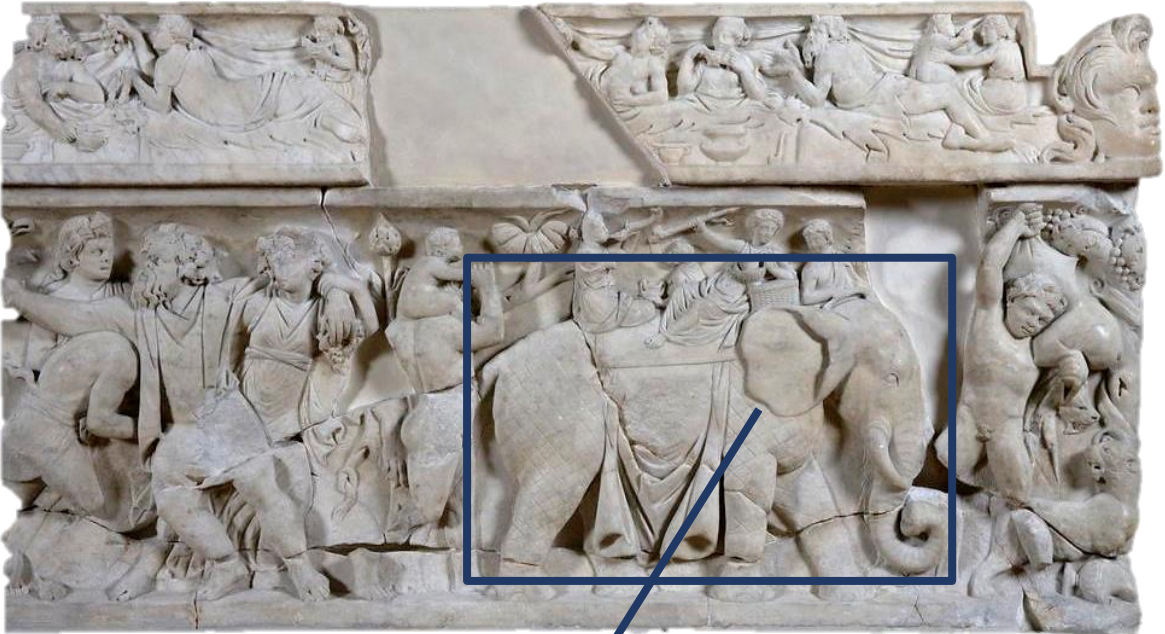
Pan also appears on one of the sarcophagus end panels where he is shown drunk, supported by a pair of small winged figures.



The other end of the sarcophagus depicts the **baby Dionysus** being carried in a basket by two satyrs.

Why this subject matter?

The scene is one of a **victory and triumph** and is reminiscent of a **Roman military procession**.



Interestingly, the sarcophagus depicts an **African elephant with ears that belong to an Indian elephant**.

How did the making and the transport of sarcophagi work?

Sarcophagi were widely used throughout the Roman empire from about the second century CE. The most expensive sarcophagi were made of marble, but other materials included different types of stone, lead, and wood.

The Pashley sarcophagus was carved by an expert craftsman in Italy, probably in Rome. It was then transported to Crete. It was found at Arvi, on the southern coast of Crete.

Behind the scenes at the museum

Meet Jana Mokrisova

Jana's main interest is the study of mobility and intercultural contact in Aegean and western Turkey during the Late and Early Iron Ages (1600-700 BCE).



Floor plan of the Fitzwilliam Museum The Pashley Sarcophagus is in gallery 21

