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Hirsch Library Research Guide



Mosaic Panels, The Musical Contest between Apollo and Marsyas

Unknown Roman

Roman, Roman Empire, 100-300 AD

Stone and glass mosaic, Overall: 87 x 135 in. (221.0 x 342.9 cm)

Panel A: 87 x 65 1/2 in. (221 x 166.4 cm)

Panel B: 87 x 73 in. (221 x 185.4 cm)

Museum purchase funded by Lee and Joe Jamail, the Alice Pratt Brown Museum Fund, and in 2011, the Agnes Cullen Arnold Endowment Fund in memory of Peter C. Marzio

This mosaic represents a famous scene in Greek and Roman mythology: The crowning of the god Apollo after his defeat of the satyr Marsyas in a musical contest. Apollo, seated on the right, is crowned by the goddess of victory, Nike. The lyre, a harp-like instrument, that he played upside down to win, is by his side. The two women who stand behind him are muses of the arts who judged the contest. The tree behind Apollo flourishes with green leaves, symbolizing his victory.

Marsyas, standing in the center, looks miserable and defeated, his double flute broken, a part in his hand and a part thrown to the ground by his feet. His companion, the young Olympus, wearing Eastern dress and cap, mourns his friend's loss.

Dionysus, god of wine, seated on the left rests his head on one hand and weeps for his follower Marsyas. Dionysus wears a crown of grapes and ivy. An old satyr holds his thyrsus, a long ribboned staff. The goddess of wisdom, Athena, wearing a helmet, stands behind Dionysus. It was she who invented the flute. The tree behind the defeated group stands leafless and dying, a symbol of Marsyas' soon terrible fate, to be skinned alive.

1. Marsyas, follower of the god Dionysus, who boasted of his skill in playing the flute. He loses the musical contest and suffers a terrible death.
2. Olympus, friend of Marsyas, who mourns
3. Dionysus, god of wine, who weeps for Marsyas
4. Satyr, follower of Dionysus holding the thyrsus, a staff
5. Athena, goddess who invented the flute
6. Apollo, god of the sun who played the lyre
7. Nike, goddess of victory, crowning Apollo as winner of the musical contest
8. Muses, goddesses of the arts, who judged the contest

Online Resources:

[Hirsch Library Online Catalog](#)

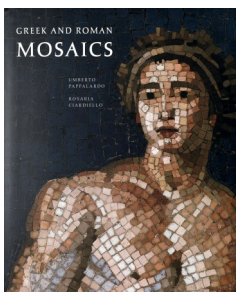
[The Metropolitan Museum of Art Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#)

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

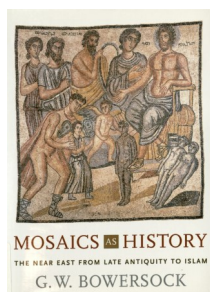
[Kondoleon, Christine. "Timing Spectacles: Roman Domestic Art and Performance." *Studies in the History of Art* 56 \(1999\): 320-341.](#)

[Panayotopoulou, Anastasia. "Roman Mosaics from Sparta." *British School at Athens Studies* 4 \(1998\): 112-118.](#)

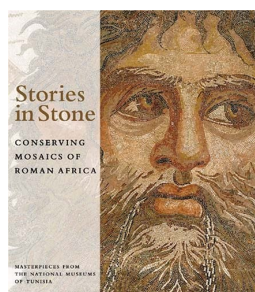
Print Resources:



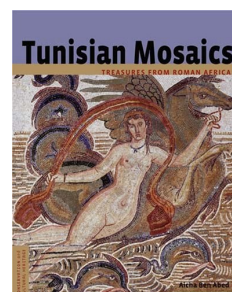
[Greek and Roman Mosaics](#)



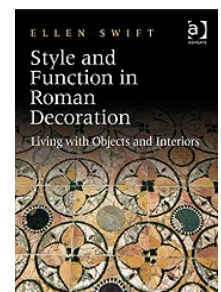
[Mosaics as History: The Near East from the Late Antiquity to Islam](#)



[Stories in Stone: Conserving Mosaics of Roman Africa](#)



[Tunisian Mosaics: Treasures from Roman Africa](#)



[Style and Function in Roman Decoration](#)

Bibliography

General Surveys of Ancient Egyptian Art

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- [Van Keuren, Frances Dodds. *Guide to Research in Classical Art and Mythology*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1991. N 7760 .V3 1991](#)

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 "mosaic" and "Roman decoration" 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:

Mosaics, Roman

Mosaics, Hellenistic

Mythology, Greek, in art

Rome--Social life and customs

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@mfa.org