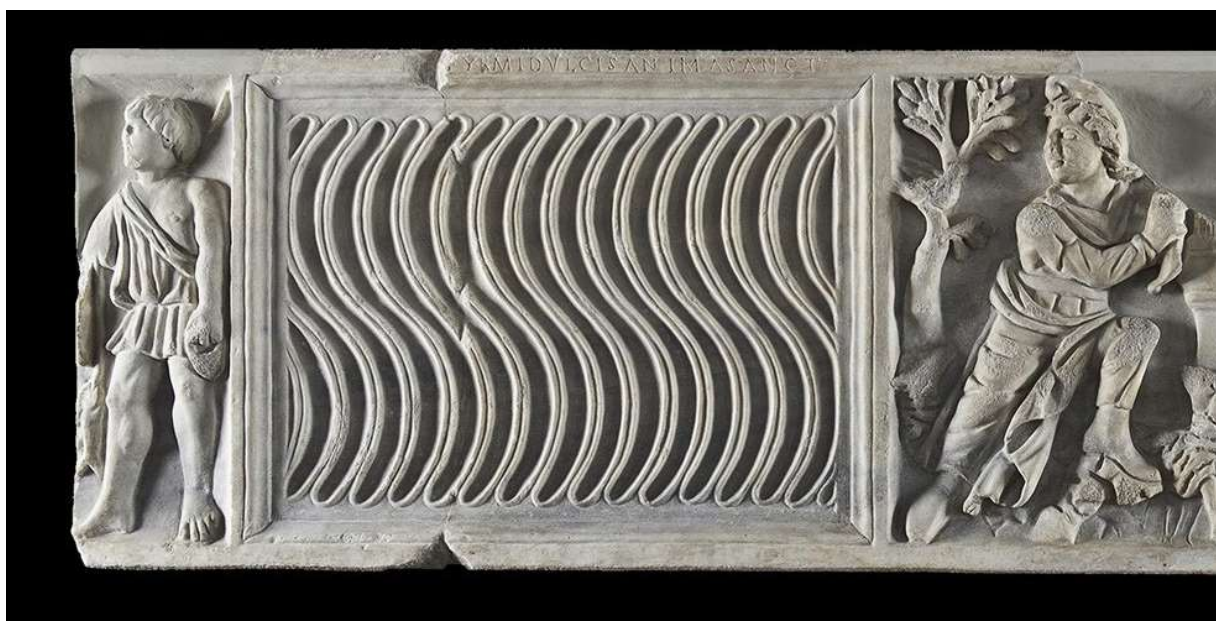


5.3 THOUGHT AND BELIEF – DEATH



Type: Roman sarcophagus with fishermen and Orpheus
Chronology: early 4th century AD
Origin: Ostia, Rome (Italy)
Actual location: Vatican Museums, inv. 31501

This is the fragmentary front of a sarcophagus bearing the epitaph of Fyrmus and decorated with the figure of a fisherman (on the left) and of the mythical Phrygian Orpheus (on the right). The sarcophagus attests a change in Roman funerary practices that increasingly shifted from cremation to inhumation during the 2nd century AD.

The presence of the fishermen and of Orpheus (the latest commonly represented on Roman sarcophagi during the 2nd century AD) likely reflects the moment of transition from pagan to Christian of Roman religious beliefs. The early Christians did not have an established repertoire of images to use and therefore adapted the traditional figurative language to their new spiritual needs. So images like those of a fisherman or of a shepherd, could refer to the figure of Christ, and the pagan shepherd Orpheus enchanted the beasts with the sweetness of his songs symbolizing the redemption generated by the Word of God.

MY RESEARCH

Research on the story of Orpheus and how it was used in Roman visual arts.

How far does Roman material culture reflect changes in funerary practice and religious identity?