

# Statue of Ariadne lying on a sarcophagus

Artist: unknown  
Date: 80 B.C. – 200 A.D.  
Dimensions: 160 x 214 x 107 cm  
Material: translucent medium grain marble with blue highlights  
Inventory no: 548

## STATE OF PRESERVATION

The condition of this statue is generally good. However, under a layer of dust and debris its surface is covered with a layer of light varnish that is spread over the body in order to soften the apparent differences of marble where previous restorations were carried out. There are several integrations in marble and plaster that have been completed in the past. Fissures are present both on the original surface and on the restored plaster areas. On the back, the statue appears to be lying on a damaged structure made of bricks, marble, and mortar.

## RESTORATION PROJECT

- 3D Documentation with laser scanner
- Analytic and stratigraphic analysis
- Cleaning and consolidation of the surface
- Elimination of previous restorations, integrations and consolidations
- Removal of iron nails located in the marble structure replaced with fiberglass or steel
- Diagnosis of state and conditions of the statue
- Recreation of a chromatic balance on the entire surface
- Study of the bottom part of the statue
- Photographic documentation

Total Cost € 40.000,00



► This large and elegant statue is now located in one of the most important and well known galleries of the Vatican Museums: the Gallery of Busts and Statues in the Pius Clementine Museum where gala dinners for Patrons are often held.

Ariadne (Latin *Arianna*) is one of the most celebrated characters of antiquity, an inspiration for artists over several centuries, like Poussin, Velasquez and De Chirico. This statue, purchased by Julius II himself, entered the Vatican in 1512; the same year Michelangelo unveiled the Sistine Chapel. No doubt Pope Julius II must have been deeply touched by the beauty and elegance of the figure, and envisioned this statue complimenting the many male statues already in the collection. Ariadne was placed in the Belvedere Courtyard where she was

intended to enhance the fountain. From this moment on the statue was one of the most important in the papal collection.

This sculpture represents a sleeping woman reclining on a rock with her legs slightly crossed. Her left arm is gently bent with her hand supporting her inclined face, while the other arm bends over her head. The young woman is wearing a long dress of light fabric folding in different ways. She also wears a mantle which folds underneath her in voluminous drapes.

Due to the snake-shaped bracelet (*armilla*) she wears, this statue was for a long time identified with Cleopatra. However, in 1782 Ennio Quirino Visconti, famous Italian archaeologist of the XVIII century, stated that the statue was indeed representing Ariadne, the daughter of Minos, who helped



the hero Theseus win over the Minotaur. The myth tells the story of Ariadne, who was abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos and then became the bride of the god Dionysus. One theory is that this statue was part of a larger and more complex group, in which Dionysus, maybe with a satyr, was portrayed in the very moment in which he sees the beautiful girl asleep and falls in love with her. However there is no other supporting documentation for this hypothesis. Yet, there are two replicas of the figure of Ariadne, one in Florence and the other in the Prado Museum in Madrid. By comparing our original to the two replicas, it is apparent that the Vatican's statue was restored several times during the XVI century. Both the replicas are more reclined on the rock indicating that the position of

our sculpture was modified. The actual position of the original was created in 1703 by Lorenzo Ottoni. In 1819, when the statue was brought back from Paris, Michele Ilari restored it once again and returned it to the original place.

This statue needs to be cleaned to determine the history, value, and provenance of Ariadne: is this statue a Roman copy of the Greek bronze original or an original from Asia Minor? The restoration will enable the Vatican Classical Antiquities scholars to track down the true artist and the history of this major sculpture that influenced so many modern artists.