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The Biography of a Dokimeion Columnar Sarcophagus Fragment*



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It has become popular over the past few decades to view objects as not merely the passive repositories of human actions but rather as integral actors in them. One such theory that attempts to articulate the relationship between humans and objects is object biography. Central to this theory is that an object accrues meaning over time through the social and cultural interactions in which it is involved. In the past this theory has been used for objects with a distinct change in their use and contexts and has articulated the shifting role these objects played in the lives of the individuals owning or using them.¹ A fragment of a columnar sarcophagus in the Museum of Art and Archaeology, although its life trajectory most likely followed an expected path from quarry to burial, has nevertheless acquired meanings over the course of its history. Using the theory of object biography and analyzing three biographical episodes in particular, this article examines the process whereby this fragment became invested with meaning (Fig. 1).² Artifacts divorced from their original context are unfortunately often seen as static and devoid of meaning, and this fragmentary single figure could be the object of similar misapprehensions, since it is not only without context but also separated from the sarcophagus of which it was once a part. Despite this, however, it is possible to discuss the vital role such



Fig. 1. Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus fragment. Roman, ca. late-second to third century CE, white Dokimeion marble, H. 63 cm. Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri (2004.88), Weinberg Fund. Photo: Jeffrey Wilcox.

a sarcophagus played as an active vehicle for the owner's status and wealth. Following an object from its conceptual origin to its final known biographical episode presents a clear narrative structure that cannot be found through any other theoretical approach. From its construction at a quarry in central Asia Minor to its expected use within a burial, to its eventual accessioning into the museum, this sarcophagus fragment acquired multifarious meanings as it actively participated in various social milieus.

Provenance

In 2005 and again in 2007 the museum tested the fragment's marble using stable carbon and oxygen isotope mass spectrometry, EPR, and petrography. The results showed that the marble was quarried at Dokimeion, one of many Roman production centers in Phrygia in Asia Minor.³ The growing demand for sarcophagi in the second century CE resulted in the development of major production centers in Asia Minor, as well as in Athens and Rome. Asia Minor, where columnar sarcophagi first developed, had a long tradition of relief-decorated sarcophagi dating back to the Hellenistic period.⁴ Sarcophagi produced at Dokimeion—often called the *hauptgruppe*, or main group, of sarcophagi from Asia Minor—number approximately 500 extant examples of various stylistic types including garland, figured-frieze, and columnar sarcophagi. Two hundred and thirty examples survive of the columnar, making it the most commonly produced type from this production center.

Dokimeion Columnar Sarcophagi

A Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus is made of two parts: the lid and the chest. The so-called kline lid in the form of a mattress, on which one or more figures recline, is the norm for most of these sarcophagi. The heads of the reclining individuals on the lid were intended to be carved with portraits of the deceased. The chests of the sarcophagi, comprised of two long sides and two short ones, were slightly larger than the dimensions of a single individual and, in fact, the remains of more than one individual have often been discovered in those sarcophagi unearthed in controlled excavations.⁵ An especially noteworthy example is the Antakya (Antioch) sarcophagus, which was excavated in 1993 and in which the remains of a man and two women were found (Figs. 2a and b).⁶

The decoration on these sarcophagi usually surrounds all four sides of the chest.⁷ It consists of a carved architectural framework with five intercolumniations on the long sides and three on the short ones. Within these intercolumniations stand or sit figures separated by spirally fluted columns with Corinthian capitals. The architectural details differ, allowing scholars to recognize three subgroups within this type. The first subgroup has a horizontal architrave with triangular pediment in the center above, flanked by arched pediments (Fig. 3a). The second subgroup displays a series of arches on all four sides, supported by columns (Fig. 3b). The most common subgroup is the third.⁸ This type has an entablature on both long sides with triangular pediment flanked by arches



Figs. 2a and b. Antakya Sarcophagus, Antakya Archaeological Museum, Antioch, Turkey. Image: <http://www.livius.org/pictures/turkey/antakya-antioch/antioch-sarcophagus/antioch-sidemara-sarcophagus-9/and-14/>.



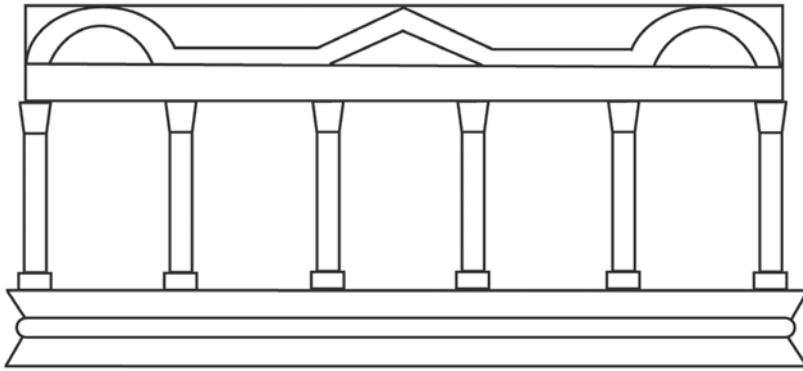


Fig. 3a. Type 1, horizontal architrave (after Guntram Koch and Hellmut Sichterman, *Römische Sarcophage* [Munich, 1982] fig. 17c).

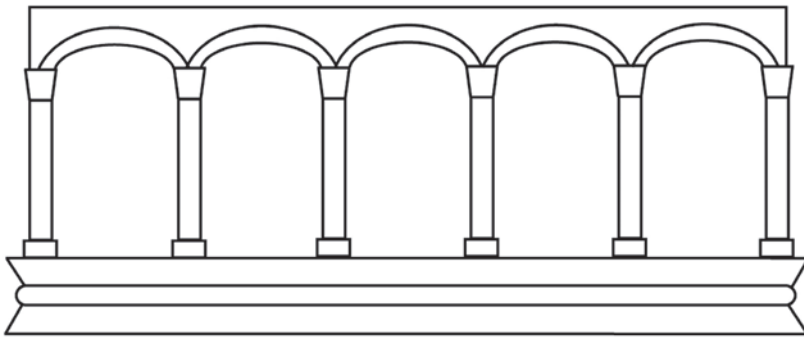


Fig. 3b. Type 2, series of arches (after Koch and Sichtermann, fig. 17b).

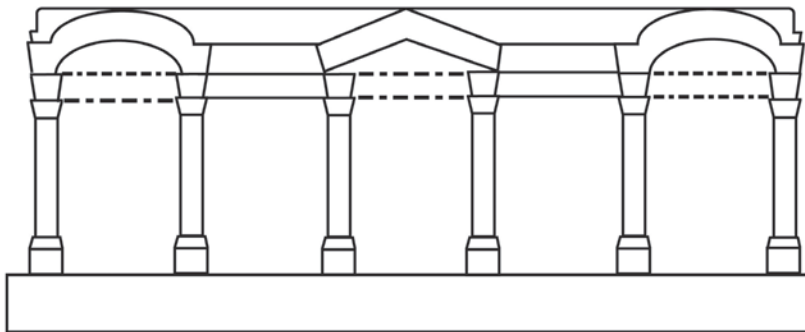


Fig. 3c. Type 3, main type of entablature (after Koch and Sichtermann, fig. 17d).

(Fig. 3c) but with a triangular pediment on the short sides flanked by a horizontal entablature.⁹

Because of the lack of controlled excavations and the fragmentary nature of the evidence as a whole, the relationship between these three different subgroups has not been fully determined. Because of stylistic similarities with the figured-frieze or “Torre Nova” type of sarcophagi of the mid-second century, the first two subgroups of Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi are generally thought to have begun around this time as well.¹⁰ Scholars suggest the third subgroup originated shortly thereafter, around 160 CE, with the so-called Melfi sarcophagus being an early example. In the third century the third subgroup dominated the production of columnar sarcophagi from Dokimeion.¹¹

Scholars have used the architectural decoration’s degree of stylization to determine the relative date of many Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi. The architectural decoration of the earliest examples is carved in more detail than the decoration on sarcophagi of later date. H. Weigand first established this distinction and used it to argue that there were two distinct types of columnar sarcophagi, a Lydian type and a Sidemara type. He postulated that the former, which is distinguished by more detail, is, therefore, earlier in date; the more stylized architectural detail of the latter indicates a later date.¹² These two types are not, however, distinct from one another but, instead, represent the fluid transition of a single type of sarcophagus from an earlier form with detailed ornamentation to a later form with more stylized decoration.¹³

The Museum’s Fragment

The preserved architectural decoration of the museum’s fragment consists of a horizontal entablature with an architrave elaborately decorated with a band of Lesbian cymation leaves topped by a band of egg and dart molding, a row of dentils, and another band of cymation leaves (Fig. 4). In the frieze above, the hindquarters of a lion are preserved striding to the right, and the remains of a triangular pediment are visible in the upper left corner of the fragment. The same architectural decoration, with slight variations in execution, appears time and again on columnar sarcophagi from Dokimeion. These details most clearly and decidedly prove that the museum’s fragment comes from one of them. Comparison of the museum’s fragment with the important Ankara A sarcophagus, dated ca. 205 CE, suggests a relative date for the museum’s piece. According to Hans Wiegartz, the Ankara A sarcophagus represents a transition between the early columnar sarcophagi and the later ones.¹⁴ Of particular note is a change in the architectural detail with now only a single egg flanked by two dart patterns placed over the capitals of the columns. Although much of the dart pattern and most of the egg of the museum’s fragment is missing, what remains of the dart molding in the form of small knobs make it clear that the reconstructed molding could only have consisted of two darts with a single egg between. There is insufficient room for an intervening dart pattern, a second egg, and a terminating dart as appears on the architectural decoration of earlier sarcophagi.¹⁵



Fig. 4. Architectural detail and head of Figure 1.



Fig. 5. Detail of upper left corner of back of Figure 1.

The remains of an acanthus leaf on the lower right corner of the museum's fragment (in the form of a stylized scroll-like leaf) are identical to those found on the Ankara A sarcophagus, an additional stylistic similarity between that sarcophagus and the museum's fragment.¹⁶ This stylized form differs greatly from that of earlier columnar sarcophagi like the Melfi one, decorated with exquisitely life-like leaves. Such details do not provide an absolute date but suggest that the museum's fragment was not produced in the early phase of the sarcophagus type (160–190 CE) but, rather, sometime after and should be identified as belonging to the third subgroup of Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi with the triangular pediment flanked by a horizontal entablature on the sides.

The youth on the museum's fragment belongs to a figure type that appears on many Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi.¹⁷ A young man wears a knee-length tunic that is cinched just below the waist by a belt tied in a square knot (Fig. 1). He is shown facing to his right, drawing back his cloak that is pinned on his right shoulder. His hairstyle, like that of many other figures in the Greek-speaking Roman provinces at the time, is inspired by that of Alexander the Great.¹⁸ Although occasionally interpreted as simply a "draped youth," the extended arm gestures of the more complete figures suggest that the youth is a Camillus, or attendant at a sacrifice. This figure type appears on all three subgroups of Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi.¹⁹ Although many of the other figures on these sarcophagi appear with regularity on other local variants, like those produced at Aphrodisias, the figure type of a youth seems to be used only on those columnar sarcophagi produced at Dokimeion.²⁰ As the extant examples illustrate, the type first started appearing on Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi early in the production phase (see Izmir C, ca. 170 CE) and continued all the way to the end (see Akşehir A, ca. 245–250 CE).²¹ In almost every representation, this young man appears at one or both corners of one of the short sides of the sarcophagus, with the figure of a lion striding along the entablature behind the young man's head.²²

To conclude this analysis, one can say with some certainty that the museum's fragment once belonged to the most common subgroup of columnar sarcophagi produced at Dokimeion. Based on the architectural similarities between the museum's fragment and the Ankara A sarcophagus (205 CE), the fragment was probably created sometime in the late second or early third century CE. Although a more specific date cannot be determined from the evidence at hand, the provenance provides the vital context within which the fragment was first quarried, roughed out, and then sculpted.

First Biographical Episode

It has been estimated that the entire process of quarrying and sculpting a single Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus would have taken five skilled laborers over a year. Partially because of this time commitment as well as the very real worry of a change in the market resulting in the stock's loss of value, it has been suggested that Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi were not mass produced but were created by commission alone.²³ In this model, therefore, the customer acts as the catalyst for the creation of the sarcophagus by going to the sculptors' workshop to order one. This model is not perfect, especially in the cases where Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi have been found far from Asia Minor, as in Rome, making a personal commission difficult.²⁴

Although it is impossible to know for certain the exact circumstances that led to the construction of the museum's fragment, it is nevertheless possible that it originated as such a commission. Despite the uncertainty of its conceptual origin, an analysis of the tool marks on the surface of the fragment reveals the first biographical episode of its life as it passed between the hands of the multiple individuals who shared in its creation. Evidence from the first stage in the history of this specific fragment appears in the form of tool marks left at different stages of production (from *officina* to the sculptors' workshop). They are evidence not only of the fragment's first biographical episode but also of the biographical intersection between the object and the people who created it.

Although the tools were not used in a unique manner, the marks they left behind are, in a sense, the fingerprints of the individual sculptors who participated in the creation of the sarcophagus. In a way, therefore, they reflect the organization of the industry itself as the fragment moved through the production process. For instance, the heavy point work on the back of the fragment, the interior of the sarcophagus, was most likely done by the workshop that received the block of marble from the quarry and roughed it out into a more careful shape.²⁵ This process was achieved by the use of a heavy pointed chisel, as is attested by the marks left on the fragment (Fig. 5). It has been suggested, most notably by J. C. Fant, that the word *officina* that appears with regularity on inscriptions at the Dokimeion quarry refers to such a workshop that carved the marble block into a rough shape. Such examples of roughed out sarcophagi chests and kline lids have been found at the site of the ancient quarry at Dokimeion. This method was an important step in the production process because it both reduced the weight of the block itself (making it easier to transport) and revealed any hidden faults beneath the surface of the marble.²⁶

Evidence of either a claw chisel, or possibly a claw chisel over light point work is attested in the form of a band approximately 4.3 cm wide at the top of the fragment (Fig. 5). This small band is separated from the heavy point work below it by a groove approximately 4–5 mm wide made by a flat chisel. Following the line of this chisel mark one can clearly see that it meets at the upper left corner with another chisel mark, this one vertical. This further indicates that the fragment was on a corner of the sarcophagus of which it was once a part, with the chisel line carved to create the interior corner.

Additional marks left on the fragment indicate an intermediate stage of carving that most likely occurred at the site of the sculptors' workshop. After receiving the roughed-out sarcophagus from the quarry-based *officina*, this workshop, possibly located at the quarry or maybe in a nearby city, would then begin the process of adding the decoration along the outside of the chest. The remains of this stage of the carving can be seen on the top of the museum's fragment where the marble extends 2 cm up to form a lip that would have acted as half of the joint for the lid (Fig. 6). Here light point work appears, formed by a smaller point chisel than the one used on the back of the fragment. Tellingly, the top of the lion, which is seen striding along the top of the entablature, is also left in this half-finished state (Fig. 6).

This indicates that at the very least the architectural decoration was roughed out in this manner as well but was subsequently finished.²⁷ The roughing out of figures by means of a light point chisel or punch was a common technique and can be seen on an unfinished sarcophagus lid currently in the Capitoline Museums in Rome.²⁸



Fig. 6. Detail of top of Figure 1.

The third and final stage of production attested by the museum's fragment comes in the form of fine grooves on the figure's neck, right cheek, and tunic on his upper right chest (Fig. 7). These were most likely made by scraping a fine-toothed tool over the surface. In the past, most scholars would have agreed that these marks represented the finish the sculptors put on the sarcophagus. Although other methods such as the use of abrasives were commonly employed, scraping was also quite common.²⁹ Recent studies into the polychromy of Greek and Roman sculpture suggest, however, that this scraped surface was in fact used to facilitate the application of paint or gilding.³⁰ Although no one has published a study of the use of polychromy on columnar sarcophagi, or indeed on any sarcophagus from the Dokimeion workshop, scholars have shown that sarcophagi of the period were indeed embellished with polychromy. For instance, the late second to early third century sarcophagus of Ulpia Domina, carved in Rome of Proconnesian marble, retains traces

Fig. 7. Detail of Figure 1 showing scraping marks on figure's tunic.



of pigments. Reconstructions show that every surface of the exterior of the sarcophagus was painted in red ochre and blue tones.³¹ It might prove useful to analyze the museum's fragment using similar, non-invasive multi-spectral imaging to determine whether any polychromy remains visible. Until such a study can be conducted, however, the most we can say is that it is likely the sarcophagus from which the fragment came was embellished in some way with paint and/or gilding.

Second Biographical Episode

Because this fragment has been so long divorced from its original context and has passed through the hands of innumerable owners, it is impossible to know for certain the circumstances surrounding its ultimate use. Because of this, the second biographical episode of the fragment is not as clear as the first. With this caveat in mind, however, analysis of two case studies with more concrete contexts can shed light on the role this specific fragment might have played in the life of the individual who commissioned it.

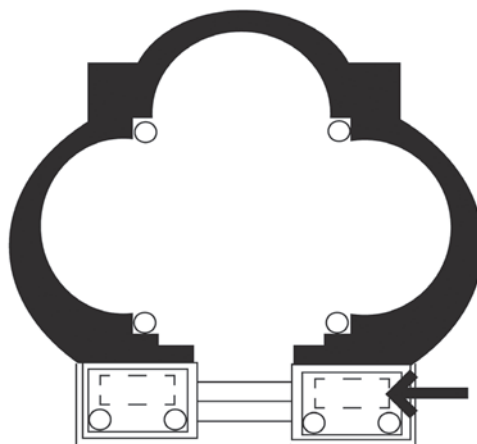
The following two case studies of Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi were chosen for several reasons. First, they provide evidence of the individuals buried within their sarcophagi, since both come from more secure archaeological excavations than most and have been the subject of some study. This allows for a more specific analysis of the owners, something that is lacking in the case of the museum's fragment. Second, both case studies

are examples of the two more common forms of display during the second and third centuries.

The tomb of Claudia Antonia Sabina, located in Sardis, lies west of the Patoklos River and the city wall. Very little of the tomb itself has survived, but the foundations indicate that the tomb was prostyle in the form of a triconch building with a straight facade wall. An elaborate Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus was discovered at the site, with an inscription on the front that identified the owner of the sarcophagus as Claudia Antonia Sabina. H. C. Butler, the original excavator of the tomb in the early twentieth century, reconstructed the sarcophagus on an exterior pedestal, flanking the entrance to the tomb itself (Fig. 8).³² The sarcophagus of Sabina consists of a kline lid with the figures of two reclining women. The larger, bareheaded woman is interpreted as Sabina, the smaller, veiled figure as her daughter. Unusual, but not unheard of for Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi, the chest of this sarcophagus is only carved on three sides, presumably because the back was placed against a wall. All together eleven figures—seated females, standing draped males, and heroic nude males—are carved on the sarcophagus.

In addition to identifying the owner of the sarcophagus as Sabina, the inscription also identifies her as a woman of consular rank (*ὑπατικής*), a rare instance of this adjective being applied to a woman in her own right. It has been suggested that it means that she was the wife of an ex-consul.³³ C. R. Morey postulates that the presence in Lydia of an ex-consul of Rome and his wife means that he filled the consular office of proconsul of Asia. Morey, therefore, suggests that Sabina's husband was Sulpicius Crassus, proconsul in 190–191 CE or 191–192 CE, who was put to death there by Commodus. Perhaps the execution of her husband encouraged Sabina to remain in the province, where she died and was buried, instead of returning to Rome as would be expected of the wife of a magistrate holding temporary office abroad. Regardless of the exact details surrounding the identity of Claudia Antonia Sabina, it is nevertheless known that she was a woman of

Fig. 8. Plan of the tomb of Claudia Antonia Sabina with location of the sarcophagus (after Sarah Cormack, “The Space of Death in Roman Asia Minor,” *Wiener Forschungen zur Archäologie* 6 [2004] fig. 176a).



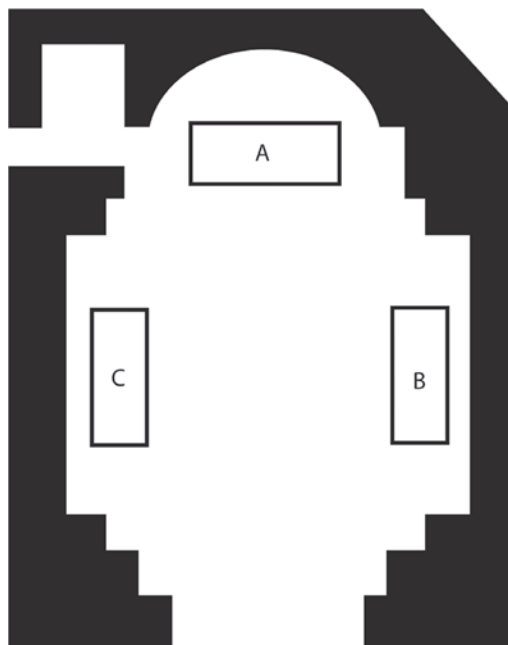
high social standing and was an active philanthropist in the region of her home in Sardis. For instance, in 211–212 CE she contributed to the gilding of the Marble Court at Sardis, along with Flavia Politta from Apollonis.³⁴ That a wealthy and highly influential woman chose a Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus for her burial and that the sarcophagus was placed flanking the entrance to the tomb suggests that the sarcophagus served a deliberate role in the context of her burial.

Inextricably connected to this deliberate role was the expensive nature of a Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus. Referred to as *marmor phrygium*, *marmor synnadicum*, or *marmor docimium*, the white marble quarried at Dokimeion was prized by the Romans for its fine-grained silvery-white quality and was used extensively for sculpture and sarcophagi.³⁵ In addition to the quality of the material, the final product itself would have been extremely expensive, a quality that added yet further to the exclusivity of this sarcophagus type. The only sarcophagus cost known during the Roman Empire was inscribed on a late third-century, undecorated, limestone piece from Salona and is recorded at approximately 15 solidi or 150 denarii.³⁶ The minimum annual subsistence for an individual in Rome has been estimated as approximately 29 denarii. This undecorated limestone chest, at 150 denarii, would, therefore, have cost more than five times the minimum annual subsistence of an individual.³⁷ We can assume, then, that an ornately decorated Dokimeion marble sarcophagus like Sabina's, and the museum's fragment as well, must have cost the commissioners of both works a great deal of money.³⁸

Both the cost of manufacture and the prized nature of the material itself lent Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi an aura of luxury and exclusivity, of which the owners were certainly cognizant. If Sabina did indeed order that her Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus be displayed outside her tomb as Butler suggests, she was likely aware of the message it sent passersby: here lay a woman of means and status. In this way the sarcophagus would have acted as an active conveyor of Sabina's status and wealth to the outside world. The efficacy of this message was intimately bound up in the ability of the viewer to distinguish an expensive Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus from one of the more commonly occurring local variants. In the case of Sabina this could have been achieved by placing the sarcophagus in a place of power, on a pedestal, framed by the columns of the porch and flanking the entrance to the tomb.

This placement of a Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus is not an isolated example. Esen Oğus in her analysis of the sarcophagus types found in necropoleis of Asia Minor noted that, at least in the case of the city of Hierapolis, many of the owners who could afford Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi placed them in the open to be visually compared with and, no doubt, deemed worthier than those sarcophagi of local stone.³⁹ Perhaps just as a safety precaution lest anyone foolishly mistake the identity of his "authentic" Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus, one owner went so far as to explicitly state the provenance on an inscription on the sarcophagus itself. Oğus' research at Hierapolis would therefore lend some credence to Butler's reconstruction of Sabina's tomb, with her sarcophagus outside, flanking the entrance.

Fig. 9. Plan of the tomb of Claudia Antonia Tatiane with her columnar sarcophagus located at A in the apse (after Cormack “Space of Death,” fig. 91).



The second case study comes from the city of Ephesos, located along the coast of Asia Minor. The tomb of Claudia Antonia Tatiane is located near the Magnesian Gate of the city and consists of a centralized plan with a cella, apse, and niches (Fig.9).⁴⁰ Sarcophagus fragments were found in and around the tomb. Located within the apse, the focal point of the cella, lay fragments of a Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus. It has been widely accepted as belonging to Tatiane herself because of the central placement of the sarcophagus and because the only other extravagantly decorated sarcophagus—an Attic Battle sarcophagus—has an inscription identifying the owner as Aemilius Aristeides. The tomb dates to around the first decade of the third century as indicated by the tomb type and the style of the portrait of Aemilius Aristeides. Carved on a marble sarcophagus base found in the tomb is an inscription that grants permission, by Tatiane, for her brother Aristeides and his wife to be buried with her in the tomb:

To Aemilius Aristeides, equestrian, Kl. Antonia Tatiane greetings. I concede to you, my brother, the [... burial place] in my heroon which is located in Ephesos outside the [Magnesian Gate], in which you may bury your wife . . .

It has been suggested that this Claudia Antonia Tatiane is the same woman of that name who lived in Aphrodisias—a woman of equestrian rank, cousin to two senators, and a benefactress to her city. If this is the case, then the geographical specificity in the

inscription (“in my heroon which is located in Ephesos . . .”) might be explained in light of her holding residence in another city entirely.⁴¹ If Claudia Antonia Tatiane is to be identified as the same woman from Aphrodisias, however, one should question why she would choose to be buried in Ephesos rather than in her own native city of Aphrodisias. It is, therefore, entirely possible that she is not this other Claudia Antonia Tatiane, but instead simply a wealthy resident of Ephesos with the same name.

Nevertheless, that Tatiane was a highly influential woman within her community is attested by the presence of Aemilius Aristeides in her tomb, an individual she lovingly identifies as her “brother” and who himself was a wealthy member of the local elite.⁴² Although Tatiane’s social standing cannot be exactly determined, her ownership of a Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus and the construction of a heroon-style tomb indicate that she was a wealthy woman. Like Sabina, therefore, the owner of this specific Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus hailed from the upper echelons of society in Roman Asia Minor.

This second case study is important because it illustrates an alternative manner in which columnar sarcophagi were placed within tombs. The apsidal niche within which the sarcophagus was placed is centrally located and would have provided a visual focal point for any visitor entering the tomb. In addition, any visitor wishing to enter the secondary room or to ascend the stairs to reach the upper floor would have had to navigate around Tatiane’s sarcophagus. In this way, the placement of the Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus would have forced a visitor to visually interact with the sarcophagus from different angles and to admire the sculpted scenes that circumscribed the entire chest. Just as Sabina positioned her sarcophagus in a place of power, so too did Tatiane.

Whereas the sarcophagus of Claudia Antonia Sabina was located outside as a visual representation of her social status for all passersby to see, the sarcophagus of Claudia Antonia Tatiane, placed within the tomb itself, spoke visually to a much smaller audience. That is to say, when it is placed inside the tomb, the intended audience for the powerful statement of a Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus shifts to only those individuals who visit the deceased on a ceremonial basis. This change in audience in no way lessens the power of the message concerning the owner’s status. In fact, the placement of the sarcophagus within the rear apse underscores the message since the sarcophagus now plays a privileged role in the hierarchy of space within the tomb itself.

Just as the placement of these sarcophagi in positions of power underscores their importance and lends weight to their message of prestige and status, so too does the iconography. The architectural iconography of the museum’s fragment with a figure set within a niche flanked by columns echoes public buildings of Roman Asia Minor built in the second and third centuries. The placement of some columnar sarcophagi figures on pedestals mirrors the dialogue between statuary figures placed between columns on such public buildings as theaters, baths, gates, and libraries.⁴³ For instance, such statuary placement can be seen on the *scaenae frons* of the theater at Aizanoi and the facade of the Library of Celsus at Ephesos. These buildings mark a period in the architecture of Roman Asia Minor when the theatrical mode of presenting statues in pedimented columnar niches was applied to public buildings.⁴⁴

Although certainly not directly imitating any public building in particular, columnar sarcophagi of Asia Minor nevertheless clearly recalled these grand public buildings in their use of figures placed within columniated niches. While not nearly as expensive as their actual architectural counterparts, these columnar sarcophagi would have nevertheless held some of the same connotations of prestige and power simply by their association with such buildings. These private sepulchral monuments, therefore, take on not only the aesthetic appeal of such facades but also the prestige associated with the erection of such public benefactions. The presence of the owner of a columnar sarcophagus, in portrait form reclining above such power-charged iconography, directly connects the owner to the prestige associated with the iconography itself. In this way, therefore, the iconography of Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi—like that of Claudia Antonia Sabina, Claudia Antonia Tatiane, and the museum’s fragment—enhances the owner’s image and status by its very association with such public benefactions.

It is impossible to know the exact circumstances of the final deposition of the museum’s fragment. Nevertheless, the prized nature of the marble, the quality of the craftsmanship, and these two case studies of standard sarcophagi burials have provided a possible picture of the second biographical episode of this fragment’s life. As a Dokimeion columnar sarcophagus, the sarcophagus whence this fragment came played a vital role in the social context of death during the late second or early third century CE. The social value of the sarcophagus lay in its ability to carry out the role of conveying the owner’s status and wealth. The moment this conveyance was disturbed—as a result of reuse, looting, breakage, or any other such disruptive activity—the second biographical episode of the fragment came to an end.

Third Biographical Episode

Just as the lack of context makes it difficult to understand this fragment’s first two biographical episodes, so too does it render its third episode difficult to interpret. Whether as a result of ancient looting or some other destructive process, the fragment was separated from the rest of the sarcophagus. Whereas the scientific and stylistic analyses discussed above temporally grounded its first and second biographical episodes, the daunting gap of millennia and miles makes an analysis of the third episode impossible. This difficulty is particularly compounded given the multivalent manner in which Roman sarcophagi were used and collected over the centuries.⁴⁵ The museum records indicate that the fragment was once a part of an old German collection of the 1960s and 1970s. No further detail was provided in the sale catalogue on the identity of the collector, the extent of his collection, or the provenance of the fragment. Nevertheless, although it is impossible to know how and when the fragment was taken from its original context and how it was subsequently used, its life begins again as an object in an art collection.

Two significant changes occurred as a result of entering the art market and a collection. Understanding these two changes will serve to elucidate the shifting role the fragment played in the lives of its new owners. First, the fragment acquired a financial value. In

this case, the quality of the craftsmanship and the desirability of the material would not have been the determining factors for the value as it had been when the sarcophagus was made centuries earlier. Instead, a value based on the fragment's relative association with other objects of its kind and the peculiar whims of the market determined the monetary value established at the time of sale. The second significant change occurred the moment the fragment went from being seen as a broken remnant of an old sarcophagus to understanding it as having inherent value in and of itself. In many ways this shift is an arbitrary one in that there is no specific mode of measuring when an old object goes from "old" to "antique" and therefore goes from "trash" to "treasure." As the centuries passed, the fragment acquired value as a work of "art," and it eventually entered the art market and the collection in Germany.

Collecting is not simply the gathering together of things but, rather, the performance of a unique form of object-human relations.⁴⁶ Actively choosing specific objects and joining them together with other, perhaps disparate, ones necessarily results in the assigning of new meaning and value to these objects. Although the exact motives behind the purchasing of the fragment by the German collector remain unknown, the fragment nevertheless acts as an integral player in this interaction. Whether as a means of expressing the breadth of the owner's appreciation of art and of once again conveying status, or as an intimate connection to the past, the fragment could have served any number of purposes in its role within the important cultural phenomenon of collecting.

The fragment's accessioning into the museum in 2004 after it was purchased from Christie's auction house marks its most recent biographical episode. That the meaning and importance of an artifact changes when it becomes a museum object has been noted in past studies of museology and serves as an interesting theoretical problem for museums and curators alike.⁴⁷ This fragment's separation from other artifacts that remain on the art market and its designation as part of the collection has been marked by significant forms and levels of attention including careful storage and display as part of an exhibition. When the museum purchased the fragment at auction in 2004, they established its value in dollars, but due to current museum practices, it cannot be considered a financial asset of the University of Missouri.⁴⁸ In this way, therefore, the value of the fragment has changed as, for the first time in its history, its financial value is restricted by museum ethical guidelines.⁴⁹

Although some might consider the accessioning of an object the final stage in its biography, it instead marks a significant step toward the assigning of new and varied meanings.⁵⁰ Each time the fragment is exhibited, it has the chance of acquiring a new set of meanings and values. Now that it is a part of the museum's collection, exhibit designers, curators, and museum educators all have a hand in assigning these new meanings.

The columnar sarcophagus fragment is currently on long-term display in the museum's permanent gallery, in the space reserved for artifacts from the ancient Mediterranean world. The exhibit designer has suggested the importance of the fragment by mounting it on a rod, which discreetly secures the fragment to a low-lying plinth. This form of mounting alone contains opportunities for the construction of meaning. The choice of mount

gives the fragment the appearance of floating in mid-air, a visual that at once emphasizes its fragmentary state and yet reimages the fragment as a self-contained work of art, to be considered and appreciated on its own. Panning outward from the fragment to the objects displayed alongside it, the opportunity for meaning making expands as well. Like all objects in museums, this fragment bears a complex relationship to the other objects in its vicinity as it derives meaning from these associations through the careful planning of the exhibit itself. If the fragment is read in light of the other marble artifacts nearby, it acts as a representative example of Roman marble sculpture from Asia Minor.

Placement of the fragment and subtle association with other objects are not the only means by which its meaning can change while on display. The curator's placement of an interpretive panel for the fragment prioritizes it over the other objects nearby that are only given small identifying labels. Explicitly, the panel retrieves the fragment's context by identifying it as part of a sarcophagus, made sometime in the late second or early third century CE in the Roman province of Asia Minor. A line drawing of a complete columnar sarcophagus reconstitutes the fragment on display to its original whole. The work of the curator is completed by the museum educator or docent, who is instructed to explain that the fragment is a feature of Roman funerary customs of the time.⁵¹

Finally (although by now it should be obvious that nothing about the interpretation of this fragment is final), the role it plays in the function of the museum itself affords other opportunities for additional meaning. Like most museums, the Museum of Art and Archaeology has both gallery space dedicated to traveling, or temporary exhibits and space where long-term exhibits are displayed. The latter forms the backbone of the museum's interpretive program, providing an established experience that, in theory, remains relevant for years at a time. As a space that returning visitors experience time after time, the permanent gallery has come to serve as the museum's brand, or image, whether intentionally projected as such or not. Objects displayed as part of a permanent exhibit therefore take on an additional layer of meaning, becoming icons of the museum itself. These are the objects used in advertisements, that appear on the museum's Facebook page, and whose likenesses are marketed on postcards and stationary at the gift shop. Although only relatively recently purchased, the columnar sarcophagus fragment has already acquired icon status. For a number of years, its likeness graced a light-pole banner on the street behind the museum. Now the fragment becomes not just an icon of the museum but an emblem of its Roman antiquities collection. In this way, a fragment of stone can be asked to hold within itself the entire sweep of Roman history.

All of this, however, presupposes that visitors are passive receptors of the interpretation intended by staff, from curator to marketing manager. Two decades of research into the informal learning of museum visitors argues against such a neat supposition.⁵² In reality, visitors have a whole host of psychological baggage, just a small fraction of which can color the way they experience objects in museums.⁵³ If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so too is meaning, and each visitor who stops to contemplate the sarcophagus fragment walks away with his or her own understanding of it. In short, the number of new meanings attached to the fragment is only limited by the creativity of the staff and the

number of visitors to the exhibit. In this way, therefore, the fragment plays a vital role in the overall discursive experience of visiting the museum.

From the quarry in central Asia Minor, to its deposition within (or without) a tomb, through to its eventual position in a collection and then a museum, this fragment of a columnar sarcophagus has had a lengthy history. Not only evident in the physical breaks on the fragment itself, history has indelibly marked it with a variety of meanings. Through the use of the theory of object biography, these various meanings have been elucidated in an attempt to understand the manner in which this fragment was invested with meaning. In so doing, it is now clear how important it remains today as a means of providing insight into the society that created it and used it, and now, millennia later, into the society that views it on display.

NOTES

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1. For various ways in which this theory has been used, see Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1988) pp. 64–91; Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, “The Cultural Biography of Objects,” *World Archaeology* 31 (1999) pp. 169–178; Susan Langdon, “Beyond the Grave: Biographies from Early Greece,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 105 (2003) pp. 579–606.

2. Columnar Sarcophagus, white Dokimeion marble, preserved H. 63 cm, preserved W. 29.50 cm, Depth 17 cm, acc. no. 2004.88, Weinberg Fund. Published: Christie’s, New York, Antiquities, sale no. 1446, December 2004, lot no. 607; Benton Kidd et al., “Determining White Marble Provenance of Greek and Roman Sculpture in the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri,” in Anna Gutierrez Garcia, ed., *Interdisciplinary Studies on Ancient Stone: Proceedings of the IX Association for the Study of Marble and Other Stones in Antiquity (ASMOSIA) Conference (Tarragona 2009) International Certification Accreditation Council (ICAC)* 23 (Tarragona, 2012) pp. 241–242, fig. 8.

3. Kidd, “Determining White Marble Provenance,” pp. 241–242.

4. Guntram Koch and Hellmut Sichtermann, *Römische Sarkophage* (Munich, 1982) p. 476.

5. Jas Elsner and Janet Huskinson, eds., *Life, Death, and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berlin, 2011) p. 2.

6. Antakya sarcophagus, ca. 250 CE., Antioch Archaeological Museum. See Ogus, “The Antakya Sarcophagus: Aspects of Decoration, Transportation, and Dating,” Bilkent University, *Department of Art History and Archeology Newsletter* 3 (2004) and “Design Elements and the Chronology of the Docimeum Columnar Sarcophagi,” M.A. thesis, Bilkent University, 2003, pp. 167–168.

7. Ogus, “Columnar Sarcophagi from Aphrodisias: Construction of Elite Identity in the Greek East,” Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2010, p. 171.

8. Marc Waelkens, *Dokimeion: Die Werkstatt der repräsentativen kleinasiatischen Sarkophage: Chronologie und Typologie ihrer Produktion (Archäologische Forschungen* 11 [Berlin, 1982]) pp. 71–101. Based on the most recent, comprehensive list of Dokimeion sarcophagi, I have been

able to determine that ninety-seven of the 226 identified Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi fragments belong to this third subgroup. There is a possibility that some of the more fragmentary fragments may also belong to this group, but not enough detail survives to be certain regarding the architectural decoration and therefore the subgroup to which they belong.

9. Ogus, "Columnar Sarcophagi," pp. 172–173.

10. Koch and Sichtermann, *Römische Sarkophage*, pp. 503–505. "Torre Nova" type sarcophagi, so named for the city in Italy where one was first uncovered, are also known as figured-frieze sarcophagi from the figures, frequently standing, that are depicted around the perimeter of the sarcophagus.

11. Koch and Sichtermann, *Römische Sarkophage*, p. 506. For production during the third century, see also Ogus, "Antakya Sarcophagus," pp. 167–168.

12. H. Weigand, "Baalbek und Rom, Die Römische Reichskunst in Ihrer Entwicklung und Differenzierung," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 29 (1914) p. 73. The two sarcophagi that established this distinction were the Melfi sarcophagus (Lydian) and the Istanbul B sarcophagus (Sidemara) (C. R. Morey, "The Origin of the Asiatic Sarcophagi," *The Art Bulletin* 4, 2 [1921] figs. 5 and 1).

13. Hans Wiegartz, *Kleinasiatische Saulensarkophage: Untersuchungen zum Sarkophagyptus und zu den figürlichen Darstellungen* (Berlin, 1965), and Gloria Ferrari, *Il commercio dei sarcofagi Asiatici* (Rome, 1966).

14. Wiegartz, *Kleinasiatische*, p. 32.

15. Cf. the Melfi sarcophagus. Morey, "Origin," fig. 5.

16. Wiegartz, *Kleinasiatische*, pl. 6f.

17. The term "figure type" was used by Wiegartz in the first classification of this sarcophagus type. In an attempt to organize the iconography of the sarcophagi, he applied the term to figures with similar stance and similar clothing. *Ibid.*, pl. 25b.

18. A. Cameron, "The Greek Renaissance in the Roman Empire," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London, Supplement* 55 (1989) pp. 108–113, suggested quite convincingly that the reappearance of this hairstyle around the late second and early third centuries CE was part of a fashion for archaism, which had enraptured much of the Greek-speaking world of the Roman Empire as part of the Second Sophistic.

19. See Izmir C for an example of the first subgroup with a horizontal architrave (Wiegartz, *Kleinasiatische*, p. 160); Akşehir A for the second subgroup with a continuous arcaded façade (Wiegartz, *Kleinasiatische*, pl. 25); the Antakya sarcophagus for the third, most common, subgroup (Fig. 2b). The museum's fragment, as previously mentioned, belongs with the third group.

20. For a list of Dokimeion-inspired columnar sarcophagi from regional workshops, particularly at Aphrodisias, see Ogus, "Columnar Sarcophagi."

21. Wiegartz, *Kleinasiatische*, pl. 25b and Ogus, "Antakya Sarcophagus," pp. 167–168.

22. The only known instances where this is not the case is on Izmir C where the figure type appears to the left of a figure of a woman (M. Lawrence, "Additional Asiatic Sarcophagi," *Memoirs of the American Academy of Rome* 20 [1951] fig. 44) and Rome D where the figure type appears at the corner of one of the long sides (C. R. Morey, *The Sarcophagus of Claudia Antonia Sabina and the Asiatic Sarcophagi. Sardis*, vol. 5, part 1 [Princeton, 1924] fig. 25).

23. Ben Russell, "The Roman Sarcophagus 'Industry': A Reconsideration," in Elsner and Huskinson, eds., *Life, Death, and Representation*, pp. 119–147. Other scholars have noted that most sarcophagi were probably not completed at the workshop and were instead shipped incomplete to be finished at the place of deposition. This remains a point of debate, however, particularly for the more elaborate sarcophagi forms like the columnar.

24. Although, as has been noted, wealthy individual customers could have sent a representative to the workshop.

25. J. Clayton Fant, “Four Unfinished Sarcophagus Lids at Docimium and the Roman Imperial Quarry System in Phrygia,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 89 (1985) pp. 26–28.

26. J. Clayton Fant, “Cavum Antrum Phrygiae: The Organization and Operations of the Roman Imperial Marble Quarries in Phrygia,” *British Archaeological Reports* 482 (Oxford, 1989) pp. 35–39.

27. Possibly the kline lid would have covered this portion of the sarcophagus as well as the top of the lion and so the sculptors felt no need to finish the smoothing process. Unfortunately, there is no published comparanda to pursue how frequent of an occurrence this was. Nevertheless, whether done intentionally or not, the unfinished top of the sarcophagus allows a look at the intermediate stage of the carving process of this particular fragment.

28. Peter Rockwell, “Some Reflections on Tools and Faking,” in *Marble: Art Historical and Scientific Perspectives on Ancient Sculpture, Papers Delivered at a Symposium Organized by the Departments of Antiquities and Antiquities Conservation and Held at the J. Paul Getty Museum April 28–30, 1988* (California, 1990) fig. 9a.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

30. The most extensive research into the application of paint and gilding on ancient sculpture comes from the work done at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. Researchers routinely provide updates on their own research and other similar studies on their website <http://www.trackingcolour.com/> (accessed April 18, 2018).

31. Eliana Siotto et al., “The Ulpia Domina’s Sarcophagus: Preliminary Report about the Use of Digital 3D Model for the Study and Reconstruction of the Polychromy,” *Interdisciplinary Studies on Ancient Stone, ASMOSIA X Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference of ASMOSIA Rome, 21–26 May 2012* (Rome, 2012) pp. 911–920. See also M. L. Sargent, “Recent Investigations of Polychromy of a Metropolitan Roman Garland Sarcophagus,” in J. S. Østergaard, ed., *Tracking Colour: The Polychromy of Greek and Roman Sculpture in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Preliminary Report 3* (Copenhagen, 2011) pp. 14–34.

32. It should be cautioned, however, that the exact positioning of the sarcophagus in the tomb remains somewhat conjectural, with Butler’s notes representing the only source on the matter.

33. Morey, *Sarcophagus of Claudia Antonia Sabina*, p. 24.

34. Riet Van Bremen, “The Limits of Participation: Women and Civic Life in the Greek East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods,” *Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology* vol. 15 (Amsterdam, 1996) p. 268.

35. Ogus, “Columnar Sarcophagi,” p. 169.

36. Russell, “Roman Sarcophagus ‘Industry,’” p. 122, calculated this by using the price of gold in Diocletian’s Price Edict as a base line to convert the solidi to Diocletianic denarii (72 solidi=1 pound of gold =72,000 Diocletianic denarii). He then he accounted for inflation when converting Diocletianic denarii.

37. Willem M. Jongman, “The Early Roman Empire: Consumption,” in Walter Scheidel, Ian Morris, and Richard Saller, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (New York, 2007) pp. 599–600.

38. Russell, “Roman Sarcophagus ‘Industry,’” p. 122.

39. Ogus, “Columnar Sarcophagi,” pp. 170–173. Sarah Cormack, “The Space of Death in Roman Asia Minor,” *Wiener Forschungen zur Archäologie* 6 (Vienna, 2004) p. 286, refers to the tombs of Aur. Padamuriane Nanelis and Aur. Artemeis at Termessos as examples of sarcophagi placed in the open.

40. Cormack, “Space of Death,” p. 220.

41. *Ibid.* Such specificity most likely does not indicate that Tatiane owned more than one heroon

and that this particular one was a gift for the exclusive burial of Aristeides and his wife, not for Tatiane herself. In his own right Aristeides was a high-ranking member of the local elite and would most likely have constructed his own tomb were it not for the generous offer to be buried in the same tomb as Tatiane herself—someone Aristeides certainly held in high regard.

42. Ibid. Aemilius Aristeides should most likely be identified as the man of the same name who held the office of procurator and who dedicated statues of Septimius Severus, Caracalla, Geta, and Julia Domna in the theater at Ephesos.

43. Edmund Thomas, “‘House of the Dead?’ Columnar Sarcophagi as ‘Micro-Architecture,’” in Elsner and Huskinson, eds., *Life, Death, and Representation* (Berlin, 2011) pp. 394–395.

44. Ibid.

45. Elsner and Huskinson, *Life, Death, and Representation*, p. 4, note that many Roman sarcophagi were used in Medieval Europe as caskets for saintly relics. Also, in Renaissance Europe, fragments and whole panels were displayed because the classicizing style and motifs spoke to the aesthetics of the period. These two possibilities represent the various roles this fragment might have played and the meanings it could have acquired either as a collectible or as a religiously charged symbol.

46. MacDonald, “Collecting Practices,” p. 71.

47. Ibid., p. 82.

48. The Museum of Art and Archaeology follows the ethical guidelines of the American Alliance of Museum’s Code of Ethics for Museums. “Disposal of collections through sale, trade, or research activities is solely for advancement of the museum’s mission. Proceeds from the sale . . . in no event shall . . . be used for anything other than acquisitions or direct care of collections.” Thus, the sarcophagus fragment has financial value only in relation to these guidelines.

49. The only case in which this would not be true is in the unfortunate event of the fragment’s destruction and the reimbursement derived from the insurance policy.

50. MacDonald, “Collecting Practices,” p. 70, argues that once an object enters a museum its history ends with it.

51. As described in the Docent Manual, Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri (unpublished and not available to the general public).

52. The most seminal of these studies are those written by John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, including Falk and Dierking, *The Museum Experience* (Washington D.C., 1992), and Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (Walnut Creek, 2000).

53. Jerome S. Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (New York, 2002).

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