

King Oeneus,
with his
typical dress
and scepter, near
an arcade

Orcus, punisher
of broken oaths,
with an axe

Artemis/Diana,
with quiver and
chiton, and a
hunting dog

One of the Dioscuri,
with the typical
pileus, holds the
javelin

Meleager, covered
by his chlamys,
charges the
decisive blow at
the boar

Atalanta,
who had hit
the boar on a ear

Other hunters close the
composition: one in
diagonal, one from the
back, the last leaning on a
spear



A hunting scene

The hero Meleager while giving the fatal blow to the Calydonian boar

TOURIST GUIDE 1

We can read about the Calydonian boar and its hunt on the narrative poem *Metamorphoses* by the Roman author Ovid who wrote it in the year 8 CE.

We'll try to tell you about the story in a few words:

Oeneus, king of the Aetolians, had offered a sacrifice to all the divinities just to thank them after an abundant harvest. Unfortunately he forgot to honor Artemis who, actually, had very little to do with agriculture (she was the Goddess of hunting, the Latin Diana, as everyone of us knows). But Artemis had a bad temper, so she thought to take revenge and, for this reason, she sent a wild and enormous boar against the country of Calydon to make him devastate the fields and kill the king's subjects. The country was frightened and worried for this.

TOURIST GUIDE 2

Meleager's heroism begins now. He was Oeneus's son, so he gathered the main Greek heroes of the time and organized a boar hunt. There was also a woman, Atalanta, coming from Arcadia, who joined the boar hunt: she knew she was a very clever hunter because she was raised by hunters, but her presence caused a lot of discontent inside the group. The Greek heroes didn't want Meleager accepted her: they were misogynistic and very superstitious and believed that a female presence brought bad luck during the hunt!!! Anyway Meleager had no intention to change his idea and didn't want to reason, also because he had got a crush on Atalanta.

TOURIST GUIDE 3

So the hunt started. The dogs were unleashed and the hunters began to look around for the beast: and they saw it at last, while it was drinking quietly near a stream. Soon the boar hurled itself ferociously into the hunters, and they tried to hurt it in many ways. Even though they were a lot, all of them missed the target except Atalanta who, instead, hit it in the ear by an arrow. The boar went on fighting till the heroic Meleager succeeded in driving his javelin into the animal's belly and finished it off with a spear thrust to the heart. Three cheers for Meleager!!!

TOURIST 1

Excuse me but... I think this is a male chauvinist viewpoint! Meleager succeeded, that's right, but he wouldn't have killed the boar if Atalanta hadn't hit its ear!!! She weakened it!!!

TOURIST GUIDE 1

That's true! Really Meleager recognized Atalanta's contribution! When his father said: *"Meleager, my boy. What honour you have done our house! Yours is the kill, you're the trophy. Come, skin the creature, take its tusks, then bring it back to the palace and we will feast and toast your triumph in wine!"* Meleager turned to face the surviving huntsmen who even now were cupping and drinking the blood that gushed from the boar's wounds. *'The hide and tusks are to go to Atalanta!' he declared. 'It was she who struck the first blow. Without her true aim the monster would still be at large and we would be carrion for the crows and foxes. The trophies are hers.'*

Actually the story of the two didn't finish well: Meleager was opposed by everyone and was killed; Atalanta ran away from Calydon, rejected by everyone, as her father did when she was born because he wanted a male heir... Later she got married but she was sad all her life long...

TOURIST 2

So, we can say Meleager was a true hero, and not only for the boar!!! He had the courage to tell the truth in a very difficult context, I'd say an impossible context!

TOURIST 3

We need heroes like Meleager even today, we need people who respect the others for what they think or do, no matter what the genre is. Three cheers for Meleager!!!

TOURIST 4

Three cheers for Atalanta, too!!! Women have always suffered a lot and they're still going on suffering. We've made very few steps forward on the way of human rights... We need to work harder and harder to fight prejudices, stereotypes and injustices still resistant in our society

TOURIST 5

Excuse me but... Stephen Fry... Is he the famous actor or just a homonym?

TOURIST GUIDE 2

He is. He is known as a famous actor – among the others, he starred Oscar Wilde in the film *Wilde* in 1997 – but he is also a writer and very fond of classical myths and heroes

TOURIST 6

Excuse me... Can I ask you another question? But... Why the story of Meleager and the boar on Henry VII's sarcophagus?

TOURIST GUIDE 3

The symbolic meanings can be a lot. Among the others:

- Power and strength, characteristics that a king must have to be considered as such
- The eternal struggle between good and evil, so the goodness that a king is expected to have
- The defeat of Death, and the illusion to be able to do that

But we can also find an artistic reason because there are some sarcophaguses with the same hunting scene which date back the 3rd century CE as Henry VII's sarcophagus