

Hypnos, God of Sleep



Sculpted by an unknown artist, this bust of Hypnos (*above*) was curatorially acquired from The Netherlands. Known as Somnus by Imperial Romans, Hypnos was the God of Sleep to ancient Greeks and would eventually be regarded as the God of Anesthesia. According to the poet Ovid, Hypnos' dark palace was a massive cave around whose mouth flourished opium poppies and other hypnotic herbs. The cave's silence was unbroken, save for the River Lethe's rushing over loose pebbles. That river's gentle babbling induced drowsiness and forgetfulness. The palace of the God of Sleep had no doors or gates and thus no hinges to disrupt his quiet with creaking noise. At the center of the palace, the slumbering Hypnos lay sprawled out upon gray sheets on an ebony bed, surrounded by countless dreams.... From Hypnos we derive the word "hypnotic," and from the River Lethe ether pioneer William Morton coined "Letheon," the name he used for disguising his anesthetic's identity from curious onlookers. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc.)

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