

DAVID
AARON



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PREFACE

Established in 1910, David Aaron specializes in Classical, Egyptian, Near Eastern, Central Asian and Islamic works of art.

The gallery maintains a vigorous level of due diligence in establishing the provenance of every piece, and every work of art is sold with an unconditional guarantee of authenticity.

The objects selected for inclusion in this catalogue are testimony to David Aaron's ongoing dedication to handling beautiful, thought-provoking and engaging works of art.

This catalogue includes objects from many notable private collections, including those of Flora Whitney Miller, George Sand, Mariane Maspero, Pedro Valero, Barbier-Mueller, James Bomford, Namio Egami and The Reichardt Collection, amongst others.

SALOMON AARON

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1

STANDING VOTIVE STATUE OF A MALE

SOUTH ARABIA, 1ST CENTURY BC–1ST CENTURY AD
CALCITE ALABASTER WITH SHELL INLAY, HEIGHT 38 CM, WIDTH 14 CM

PROVENANCE

Noble Persian collection, 1930s

This standing male figure is a funerary or votive object, hewn from a single piece of soft beige waxy calcite alabaster, a widely used material of which South Arabian craftsmen were masters. Topless and dressed in a plain skirt reaching almost to the ankles and tied with a simple banded belt, the figure stands in a fully frontal pose. The left hand is clenched in a fist, pierced vertically to hold an object, perhaps a sceptre, which is now lost. The right hand is open with the palm facing sideways towards the other hand. The feet are planted on an integrated carved base, the toes clearly detailed with sandals strapped to the feet through the second and third toes.

The placement of the half-moon-shaped ears high on the head, the long aquiline nose and the frontal pose are all characteristic of human images made in this region.¹ Such statues were often set in niches, and the surfaces not visible were consequently left unfinished on many examples. The sculptural motif of outstretched arms is common among South Arabian votive offerings and we can infer that this object would have once graced a temple, made in honour of the gods, or perhaps as a memorial sculpture commemorating a deceased.²

The carved eyes are inlaid with hard white shell, while the pupils themselves would have once been inlaid with a dark stone, possibly lapis lazuli or chlorite. A figure in the same pose with similarly inlaid eyes can be found in the British Museum, but this example has losses to its lower body and discoloration (1). While European and Western Asiatic cultures from the same period tended to cover their stone sculpture in stucco and paint,³ South Arabians prized the natural beauty of the raw material, habitually working the stone to include the inherent striation and translucency found in alabaster.

Although votive sculptures of this kind are typically found in the same pose (standing or sitting forward-facing, with arms bent out to the front





1 South Arabian standing male, Ancient Yemen, h. 45.5 cm, British Museum, London, 2002,0114.4

2 South Arabian standing male, Qataban, h. 40 cm, Aden National Museum



NOTES

- 1 P. de Montebello, *Notable Acquisitions, 1982–1983*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983.
- 2 B. Doe, *Southern Arabia*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1971, pp.98–110.
- 3 C. Reed, 'White Marble Sculptures of Antiquity', *Harvard Magazine*, November–December 2007.

at the elbow) and may initially look similar, great care and attention was put into depicting the individual. Simply dressed, with unadorned skirts for men and tunic dresses for woman, focus was placed on the distinct facial features of each person. Beards are suggested either by drilled dots or a carved 'blade' under the chin, and hair can vary greatly in length and style, with longer hair being tucked behind the ears and flaring out, plaits and curls often suggested by careful incised carving.

The great Arabian Peninsula lies at the heart of the Middle East, strategically positioned between the mighty ancient civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia. It is widely acknowledged that this part of the southern expanse of the Arabian Peninsula produced some of the most intriguing and original sculptures known from the ancient world. Given its underlying archaic simplicity combined with a high standard of workmanship in materials of natural beauty, such as gold, bronze, alabaster and stone, it is therefore no surprise that Sabaeen art is particularly noted for its influence on many of today's most celebrated modern artists; Picasso, Modigliani and Giacometti have been inspired by Sabaeen art in their various abstract representations of the human form.

BRONZE ROYAL HEAD

EGYPT, XXII DYNASTY, 945–715 BC
HEIGHT 10.8 CM



PROVENANCE

Acquired on the New York art market, 2015
Private collection of Ms Flora Whitney Miller
(above), Sotheby's, New York, 1987
F.K. collection, Bloomsbury, MI, acquired from
Royal Athena NY in 1980s

PUBLISHED

Sotheby's, New York, 29 May 1987, lot 41A
Sotheby's, New York, 11 December 1980,
lot 268

Between the death of Ramesses XI, which ended the New Kingdom, and the beginning of the Late Period in ancient Egypt, a succession of eleven Pharaohs of Libyan descent ruled the lands. This period saw the sowing of the seeds of social change in Egypt – a weakening central royal authority fell to the power of the temple networks, which became the dominant sphere for political aspirations, social identification and artistic production. Technological and stylistic innovations caused workshop output to flourish around Tanis in the northeastern Nile Delta, where many artisans of fine metalwork were based.¹ This handsome bronze bust, from the middle of the Intermediate Period, exemplifies the crafts and original forms that were produced during this time.

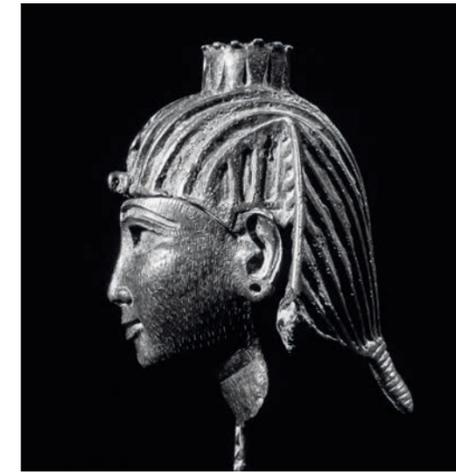
Depicting the serene and dignified face of a powerful male, the bust was originally adorned with a beard and inlaid with precious stones, set in the eye and brow grooves. The well-preserved surface exhibits a beautiful rich and deep patina – a hallmark of the fine mastery of bronzeworking from this period. The exquisite detail and precise workmanship make this a significant work of Egyptian art. This superbly executed head perhaps depicts a member of the royal household and may have adorned the inside of a temple; successive Pharaohs from this period were keen to leave their image on decorative schemes facing out from the porticos of religious buildings.²

A similar hollow-cast bronze bust also from the XXII Dynasty of almost identical size is now housed in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (2). It depicts the Egyptian deity Harpocrates, the god of silence, secrets and confidentiality. It has the same fine delineation of form and the same deep-set channels for the eyes and brows, which would have also contained precious stones and gems, but is rendered with scarring across the face, lacking the smooth finish of this example. It is complete with a detachable headset of a cast bronze wig, which the present example once





1 Head of a queen inlaid with coloured glass and gold flecks, Egyptian, XXVIII Dynasty, h. 9.7 cm, Heckett Collection



2 Egyptian bust, bronze, h. 11.8 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, F1985/12,27

NOTES

- 1 W.S. Stevenson, W.K. Simpson, *Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998, p.218.
- 2 C.R. Lepsuis, W. Bell, *The XXII Egyptian Royal Dynasty, with Some Remarks on XXVI and Other Dynasties of the New Kingdom*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.13.
- 3 M.J. Raven in P. Akkermans et al., *Bronz uit de Oudheid*, Amsterdam 1992, nos. 16–17.1.
- 4 Photograph on previous page courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C., 20540.

would have had. Another similar bronze head of a female priestess, in the Heckett Collection (1), contains inlaid coloured glass and gold flecks, supporting the idea this head would have done so too.

NOTE ON THE PROVENANCE

This piece once graced the distinguished collection of Flora Whitney Miller (b. 1897),⁴ the American artist, socialite and art collector, whose mother Gertrude (b. 1875) was heir to the Vanderbilt fortune. Together they founded the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1931, at which Flora's daughter and granddaughter still remain active. Flora was engaged to the son of the American President Theodore Roosevelt until he was killed in action in the First World War. She married her second husband in Egypt, the history of which had long enamoured her, inspiring her passion for collecting ancient Egyptian artefacts.

3

EGYPTIAN LIMESTONE STANDING NAOPHOROS

PTOLEMAIC DYNASTY, 3RD CENTURY BC
HEIGHT 102 CM

PROVENANCE

London art market, 2014
Private Japanese collection, kept in Switzerland
until 2014
Loaned to Antikenmuseum, Basel, 1998–99
Acquired on Swiss art market, 1992

PUBLISHED

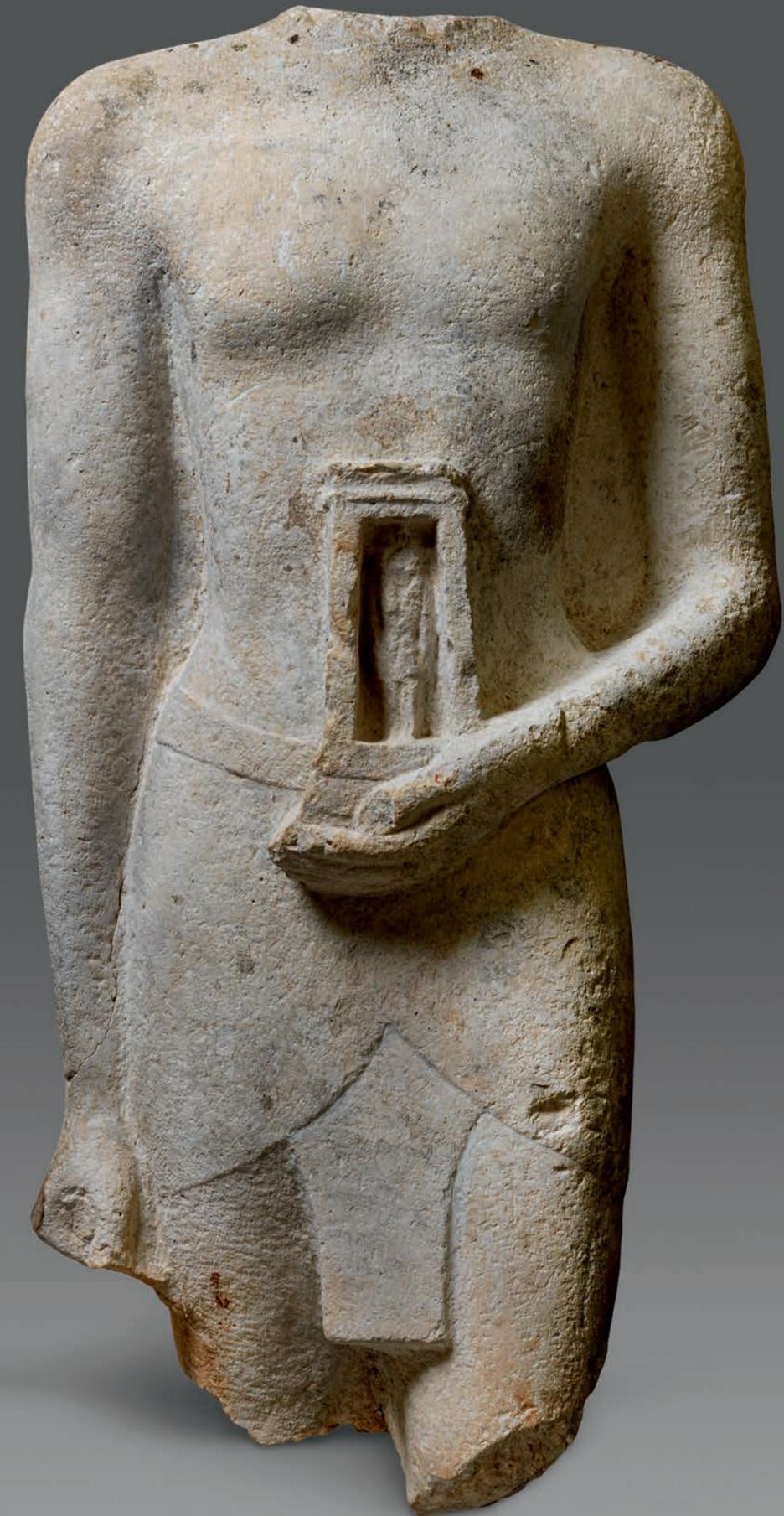
A. Wiese, *Ägyptische Kunst im Antikenmuseum
Basel und Sammlung Ludwig. Neue Leihgaben,
Schenkungen und Erwerbungen*, Basel, 1998,
p. 81, no. 101

The last dynastic rulers of ancient Egypt, the Ptolemies were a royal family hailing from Greek Macedon who controlled the Egyptian throne during the height of the Hellenistic era, from 305 to 30 BC. Ptolemy I was one of Alexander the Great's seven personal bodyguards and was appointed the governor of Egypt after his death, eventually declaring himself sole ruler. The Egyptians accepted Ptolemy's rule thanks to his keenness to assimilate their culture, and his family ruled the country until its final Roman conquest in 30 BC.

First appearing in the early Middle Kingdom, circa 2000 BC, naophorous statues of kneeling or standing priests and worshippers – made from greywacke, wood, bronze, alabaster, granite, basalt, diorite, quartzite and limestone, such as this fine example – were common throughout Ptolemaic Egypt.¹ Depicting exclusively men, they acted as an anthropomorphic bridge to allow dialogue between man and god.²

The etymology of the word 'naophoros' can be traced back to the ancient Greek *naos*, meaning 'shrine', referring to the box held in extended arms as a spiritual offering by the dedicatee. The box would typically contain a religious idol, often the god of the underworld Osiris. The presenting motion with which the box is held emphasizes the protective nature of the gesture – whoever holds the naos is asking for reciprocal protection from its inhabitant cult divinity, possibly associated with certain temple rituals or related festival processions.

This figure steps forward defiantly, resembling Archaic Greek Kouros statuary. He wears a simple three-piece shendyt, free from design or pleats, in a Hellenized tradition. His right arm extends down the length of his torso, culminating in a clenched fist, while the left hand holds the naos at navel height. The shrine contains a recessed niche, inside which is a cultic statue that is proudly presented by the statue to the gods in a gesture that mimics the outwardly stretching hands of the hieroglyphic





1 Egyptian Ptolemaic naophoros (front and back), limestone, h. 69 cm, British Museum, London, EA 92.92

NOTES

- 1 J. Josephson, M.M. Eldamaty, *Statues of the XXV and XXVI Dynasties*, American University in Cairo Press, 1999, p.6.
- 2 E. Brovarski, D.P. Silverman, *Searching for Ancient Egypt: Art, Architecture and Artifacts from the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1997, p.121.
- 3 J. Osing, E.K. Nielsen, *The Heritage of Ancient Egypt: Studies in Honour of Erik Iversen*, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum Press, 1992, p.47.

sign for 'embracing'.³ The subtly delineated musculature and smooth surface of this figure exhibits the skill of a sculptor well versed in human anatomy, and speaks of a Hellenized ideal view of the human form; superfluous details have been avoided in favour of a stylized archetype.

On the reverse of this life-size limestone statue is a panel running the entire length of the body, providing a space for the carving of hieroglyphics, which were never completed, suggesting that this statue was in fact placed with its back against a wall and perhaps had an inscribed pedestal instead. This important and exquisite statue has been exhibited in the Antikenmuseum in Basel in Switzerland as an outstanding example of Ptolemaic naophorous statuary.

A smaller limestone Ptolemaic naophoros, with its feet and head missing, exists in the British Museum in London (1). The reverse shows three lines in inscribed hieroglyphic text, an indication of how the present example might have been carved. The static nature of the British Museum example highlights the superb craftsmanship of this example, with its careful modelling and harmonious equilibrium, while also providing evidence for the popularity of the naophoros as a crucial tool in making contact with the gods.

4

EGYPTIAN USHABTI OF PENTHU

EGYPT, NEW KINGDOM, XIX DYNASTY
STONE, HEIGHT 17.8 CM



PROVENANCE

Collection of George Sand (Amantine-Lucile-Aurore Dupin, 1804–1876) (above)



PUBLISHED

2nd vente, George Sand–M Blanche, Hotel Rameau, Versailles, 3rd December 1964

The XIX Dynasty of Egypt (1292–1189 BC), best known for its military conquests in the biblical lands of Canaan, was founded by Ramesses I, whom Pharaoh Horemheb chose as his successor to the throne.

An *ushabti* is a funerary figurine, used throughout ancient Egypt, that was placed in a tomb as a servant to the deceased, conducting manual labour for them in the afterlife. Often accompanied by various tools to assist in their tasks of carrying sandals, plucking geese or baking bread, they are inscribed on their lower portions with hieroglyphs describing them as 'answerers', naming their characters and duties and summarizing their readiness to work.¹ Originating in the Old Kingdom (2649–2150 BC), they were small in size, often created in multiples, and sometimes covered the entire floor of a tomb surrounding the sarcophagus. Varying in material between wood, stone, clay, metal, glass and earthenware, often from a single mould, and sometimes polychromatic, they take on a variety of forms, depending on the styles of the time. They are found in Egyptology collections worldwide and provide great insight into the death rituals and afterlife beliefs of ancient Egyptians.

This ushabti represents a servant of 'Penthu', whose many titles were listed as 'seal-bearer of the King of Lower Egypt, the sole companion, the attendant of the Lord of the Two Lands, the favourite of the good god, the king's scribe, the king's subordinate, the first servant of the Aten in the mansion of the Aten in Akhetaten, the chief of physicians, and chamberlain'. Physician to Pharaoh Akhenaten and later vizier for Tutankhamen, he had his own tomb created at Amarna, where this statue would have probably been placed, sealed within for eternity to carry out duties for Penthu in the afterlife.

Carved from a hard stone, in a traditional mummification pose, this fine and evocative statue is imbued with a mysterious quality – rich with ancient spirituality, it speaks of a people who had a very real belief





1 Ushabti of Mesu, XIX Dynasty, Thebes, Upper Egypt, painted limestone and wood, h. 15 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 86.1.21

2 Ushabti, XIX Dynasty, dedicated to Luy, overseer of cattle, incised stone, h. 16.1 cm, British Museum, London, EA33926



NOTES

- 1 M. Zaki, *The Legacy of Tutankhamen Art and History*, American University in Cairo Press, 2008, p.56.
- 2 F. Joseph, *Archaeological Discoveries of Ancient America*, New York, Rosen Publishing Group, 2013, p.17.

in their preservation in the afterlife. Larger than the usual 9 cm height of most found, and carved in the round with fine detailing and typical stylized features such as almond eyes and a thick headdress, it is instantly recognizable as a typical work of Egyptian imagery and craft.²

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York contains a XIX Dynasty ushabti of similar size and appearance, with arms folded across the torso, frontal appearance, and also decorated with inscriptions from the hips to the ankles (1). Less detailed, however, and carved from wood rather than stone, it otherwise shares with our statuette the typical appearance of such important objects, while shedding light on ancient afterlife customs and the need to maintain social hierarchy even in death. Another parallel, found in the British Museum, also from the XIX Dynasty (2), is carved from stone as is ours, but is cruder in execution, suggesting the range in appearance in which these statues were created. Varying materials, appearances and quality depended on the wealth and status of the donor. The owner of this ushabti was no doubt an important and prosperous person.

NOTE ON THE PROVENANCE

This statue was once in the collection of the famous French novelist and memoirist Amantine-Lucile-Aurore Dupin, best known by her pseudonym George Sand (1804–1876). An eccentric character, she was well known for her romantic affairs with the composer Frédéric Chopin and the writer Alfred de Musset, among others. This piece once graced her private residence in Paris. Her collection was sold after her death, at various auctions throughout Paris, with many pieces ending up in the Louvre.

5 MONUMENTAL FALSE DOOR

EGYPT, OLD KINGDOM, 2280–2200 BC
LIMESTONE, HEIGHT 113 CM, WIDTH 66 CM, DEPTH 12 CM



PROVENANCE

Barbié family collection until 2016
Studied by the famous Egyptologist Professor John Leclant (above) in the late 1980s
With Marianne Maspero, Paris, 1980s
European private collection

This magnificently preserved Egyptian limestone false door is carved in shallow relief and would have originally closed the entrance to a small chamber inside a mastaba superstructure; this housed a votive deity statue that was used as a vehicle for the soul to reach the afterlife. It is carved with an inner and outer frame. A miniature doorway is set below in between the jambs, at the top of which is represented a rolled-up mat hanging above the entrance. In between the inner and outer lintels of the stela is an instructive representation of the deceased kneeling in front of an offering table. The outer doorframe with torus moulding is itself enclosed within a larger doorframe. All three frames have hieroglyphic inscriptions covering their surfaces, along with three figurative representations of the deceased, named Djaty. Inscribed invocations mention the dedication of a thousand loaves of bread, containers of beer, fowls, bolts of linen cloth and alabaster vessels. The finely carved sunken relief also contains traces of blue and red pigment, indicating the original rich colour scheme.

False doors like this were common throughout ancient Egypt, located inside mortuary temples and tombs. They served a passageway between the world of the living and the world of the dead, allowing the *ka* (the soul of the deceased) to pass from one to the next. As mystical objects, they allowed interaction between the sacred and the profane, and could facilitate conversation and the passing of offerings between this life and the afterlife. Particularly found in ancient Egyptian tomb complexes for the elite, these false doors were not intended to trick, as the name suggests, but were considered genuine portals between religious dimensions.¹ They were located on the western walls of Old Kingdom temples – west being the direction of the afterlife – and would have been accompanied with relief carvings of processional or ritual scenes, including meat-butchered, bird-catching and religious offering. Existing in both wood and stone, false doors are important historical artefacts as they typically record the name,



TRANSLATION

Horizontal Inscription of outside frame

Royal offering to Anubis who presides over the divine tent, who is on his mountain, in order to give food offerings to the inspector of the scribes, Djaty

Vertical Inscription of outside frame, left

Food offerings to the Imakhou near Anubis, who is on his mountain, food offerings to the inspector of the scribes, controller of a phyae [college of priests], Djaty

Vertical Inscription of outside frame, right

Food offerings to Imakhou, judge, trustee of the canals of the silver treasury, inspector of the Imakhou scribes at Ptah, Djaty

Horizontal inside inscription

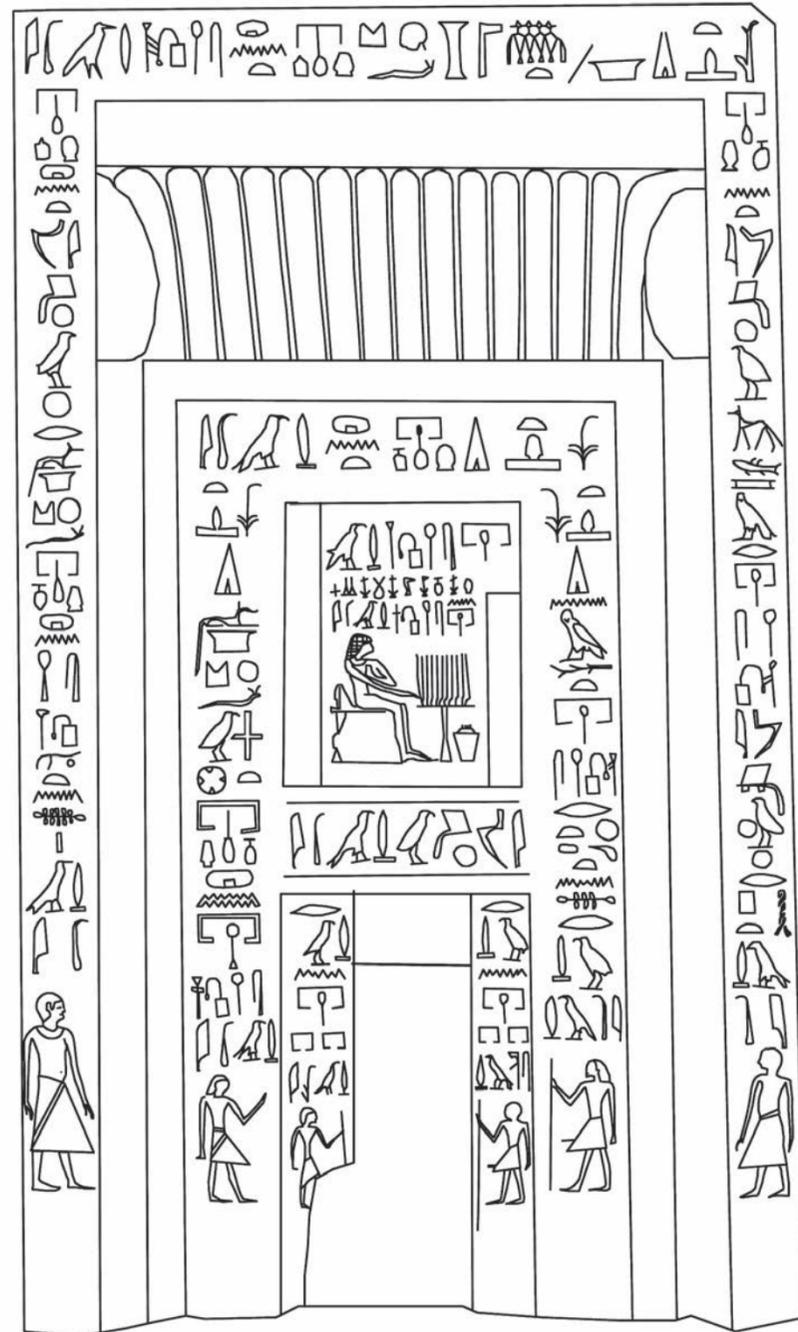
Royal offering, food offering to Djaty

Vertical Inscription of inside frame, left

Royal offering to Anubis who is on his mountain, who is in the city of Out, for the chief of the silver treasury, inspector of the scribes, Djaty

Vertical Inscription of inside frame, right

Royal offering to the chief of the silver treasury Imakhou, inspector of the scribes, controller of a phyae [college of priests], Djaty



NOTES

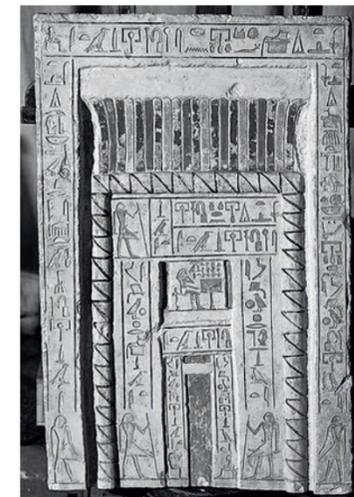
- 1 S. Snape, *Ancient Egyptian Tombs: The Culture of Life and Death*, Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, 2011. p.76.
- 2 Z. Hawass, *Inside the Egyptian Museum with Zahi Hawass*, American University in Cairo Press, 2010, p.79.
- 3 *Werke ägyptischer Kunst in Münzen und Medaillen: Auktion 46*, 28th April 1972, no. 19; E. Porter, R.L.B. Moss, J. Málek (eds.), *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Statues, Reliefs and Paintings*, Vol. VIII: *Objects of Provenance Not Known*, Oxford, 2007; exhibited in *Egyptian and Greek Art*, Wildenstein Art Center, Houston, Texas, 1978, no. 103.

title and occupation of the deceased and details of their family and leading accompanying officials, as well as lists of probable offerings between man and spirit.²

An almost identical false door in the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva bears the same inscribed name as ours, Djaty, described there as 'inspector of the scribes of the treasury' (1).³ The doors share the same size, material, decorative scheme, dedication and provenance, therefore it is possible that the two originally came from the same tomb, or that the example in Geneva was from a close relative who bore the same hereditary title. The Geneva door contains a high level of polychrome decoration (possibly much restored), which suggests how the present door would have appeared with its original pigmentation, of which only traces are now left. The two doors share the same level of exquisite craftsmanship and intricate carving with harmonious architectural proportions. The similarity between these two fine doors highlights the fact that this one is certainly museum-worthy.

NOTE ON THE PROVENANCE

This beautiful false door has had an illustrious history in recent decades. In the late 1980s the text on the door was translated by the eminent French Egyptologist Jean Leclant (1920–2011), who was Honorary Professor at the College of France, Permanent Secretary of the Academy of Inscriptions and Letters of the Institut de France, and Honorary Secretary of the International Association of Egyptologists. His excavations and research papers on ancient Egypt have been widely published and he won many prestigious awards. Prior to this, the false door was in the private collection of Marianne Maspero (née Rusen; b. 1916), the eminent Parisian dealer of antiquities, who placed Egyptian artefacts in many national museums during the 1970s–90s, including the Louvre. Marianne's husband was the grandson of the famous Egyptologist Gaston Maspero, who came up with the 'sea peoples' theory to describe Egypt's eventual decline.



1 Stele of Djaty, Saqqarah, 3rd–2nd century BC, carved limestone, blue, red, yellow and green paint, h. 102 cm, w. 6 cm, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, 23479

ITALIC BRONZE CUIRASS

MAGNA GRAECIA, CIRCA 4TH CENTURY BC
HEIGHT 39.4 CM

PROVENANCE

Private collection, California, 1990s
Peter Tillou Gallery, Litchfield, Connecticut
With Herbert Cahn

NOTES

- 1 J. König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 103.
- 2 N. Sekunda, *Republican Roman Army 200–104 BC*, Osprey, 1996, p.46.
- 3 M. Treister, 'The Theme of Amazonomachy in Late Classical Toreutics – on the phalerae from Bolshaya Bliznitsa', in C.J. Tuplin (ed.), *Pontus and the Outside World – Studies in Black Sea History, Historiography and Archaeology*, Leiden, Brill, 2004, p.205.
- 4 M. Merrony (ed.), *Mougins Museum of Classical Art*, Mougins Museum of Classical Art, p.229.
- 5 P. Connolly, *Greece and Rome at War*, London, Greenhill Books, 1981, p.110, fig.8.

First appearing in Archaic Greece, the cuirass (also known as muscle cuirass or heroic cuirass) is a form of ancient armour that came to prominence during the fourth and fifth centuries BC throughout the ancient world. Normally made from sheets of bronze, it was designed to mimic an idealized male torso, stressing the importance of maintaining a good physique to be a successful warrior, highlighting the virtues of fitness, power and stamina. The cuirass appears throughout Classical art, worn by generals, emperors and deities, with later examples often being ornamented with mythological references such as Gorgon heads (as on the now lost *Athena Parthenos*, described by Pausanias) or with gods and rearing horses (as on the Augustus Prima Porta statue now in the Vatican). Unadorned examples such as this were more commonly used for actual combat, while highly decorated examples were reserved for public procession.

The earliest known Greek example of a statue wearing a cuirass comes from a warrior torso found on the Acropolis in Athens dated 470–460 BC, while vase painters depicted muscle cuirasses on Attic red-figure pottery from 530 BC. A Roman second-century BC monument of Aemilius Paulus at the Sanctuary of Delphi depicts warriors wearing muscle cuirasses adorned with leather straps around the shoulders and waists, serving to distinguish the ranks of the infantrymen, and give an indication as to how this armour would have appeared when worn by various soldiers.

The shape of this cuirass highlights the musculature of the male body, with nipples, pectorals and shoulders, collarbone and the abdomen all accentuated in bronze – inspired by the Classical Greek notion of heroic nudity, popularized by the fifth-century BC sculptor Polykleitos.¹ Cast in two individual pieces which were then hammered into shape, the average cuirass weighed around 25 lb. This example typifies a later style that came to prominence around 450 BC, with a shorter torso that stops





1 Italic, Puglia, bronze cuirass in two parts, 350–300 BC, h: 38.5 cm, British Museum, London, 1873,0820.223



2 Italic, bronze muscle cuirass, 370–340 BC, Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi, Sicily

around the navel (possibly to allow an additional belt to be worn, as seen in the fourth-century BC *Warrior's Return* fresco at Paestum, or to allow for manoeuvrability on horseback) and is nipped at the waist, unlike earlier examples that widely extended to the hips. This example from Magna Graecia (modern-day southern Italy) characteristically lacks the shoulder guards of earlier Greek examples.² Southern Italian Hellenistic grave excavations, particularly in Campania and Etruria, have revealed several in-situ muscle cuirasses being worn by the interred, suggesting that noble warriors would have been buried wearing fine armour for use in the afterlife.³

This Italic example copies the earlier Greek tradition of an unadorned cuirass, known as the anatomical type, and was intended to be used in hand-to-hand combat, thus elevating function as highly as form. The back and breast plates are small and shallow and were never meant to be joined directly. Small perforations along the edges allowed a lining to be fitted to provide warmth, comfort and support – something not seen on early Greek counterparts, which were designed to be worn over a *chiton* (an ancient Greek sewn garment).⁴ This example has an unusual and distinctive wave pattern along its side as light decoration. The Apulia Museum in Bari in Italy contains a restored cuirass from 350 BC that has this same distinct wave along its edges where the sheets were held together, although it is much longer in form than ours.⁵ This suggests a fourth-century BC date for the present fine example, while the entire Bari assemblage also provides a further idea of how ours would have been worn with accompanying greaves, belt and helmet.

Several similar cuirasses from southern Italy can be found in public collections. The British Museum in London contains a fine Italian example from 350–300 BC that exhibits the same muscle definition as ours, likewise with double-ring clasps either side and shoulder hinges to hold it in place across the torso (1). It has been widely exhibited and is on permanent display in the Roman gallery there. The British Museum version, which survives in an excellent condition, like that of ours (despite a small area of restoration), is slightly longer than our example, however – and was perhaps intended for a foot soldier. The Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi in Sicily contains an almost identical cuirass dated 370–340 BC, which has the same stout shape but lacks the wave patterning and double-hook fixing that ours has (2). Worthy of any museum collection, this cuirass is a rare and fine example which would have once graced the torso of a great warrior in antiquity, providing him with a sense of both pride and protection as it was worn into battle.

7

EXCEPTIONAL CORINTHIAN HELMET

SPAIN, CIRCA 6TH CENTURY BC
BRONZE, HEIGHT 26 CM, WIDTH 27 CM

PROVENANCE

P.V. Collection, Madrid, since the late 1960s

NOTES

- 1 J.M. Hurwit, *The Art and Culture of Early Greece, 1140–480 BC*, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1987, p.160.
- 2 D.L. Fink, *The Battle of Marathon in Scholarship, Research, Theories and Controversies since 1850*, Jefferson NC, McFarland, 2014, p.41.
- 3 O. Palagia, J.J. Pollitt, *Personal Styles in Greek Sculpture*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.57.

A wealthy Greek soldier or mercenary in the employment of another country's army was probably the first owner of this stunning Corinthian bronze helmet. Beautifully decorated with an inscribed grotesque Gorgon or Medusa on the fore-brow, and mirrored lions that prance up each cheek panel, it is a unique surviving artefact that provides insight into ancient Greek armoury and social history. Its motifs, creatively mixing real and imaginary figures, are inspired by the Greco-Oriental repertoire that spread through the Mediterranean during the Orientalist period as a result of trade between mainland Greece and the Near East, and echo the decorative vocabulary found on proto-Corinthian ceramics. Likewise, the method of engraving used on the helmet relates to the black-figure style of vase painting found in Corinth from around 670 BC, in which incised lines are used to add detail to figure's silhouettes.

Developed in the seventh century BC, the Corinthian style of helmet had no holes for the ears, offering rounded protection at the cost of comfort, and also had a distinct phallic-shaped nose guard. The decorated cheek pieces and neck guard are flared in a highly unique shape that offers manoeuvrability during combat. Contemporary Greek vase painting, such as the seventh-century BC Chigi Vase, and passages from the *Iliad* describing battle formations (Il. 13.130–33) suggest a horsehair and leather crest may have once been attached to the top ridge of the helmet, in a display of ornamentation mimicking the fur of a beast standing on end when threatened.¹ Offering full facial protection and with padding originally glued on the inside, this helmet was part of the equipment of the hoplites, heavily armed soldiers whose appearance coincided with the adoption of new bronze weapons. Its origin is ascribed to a workshop in Argos.²

Art historical evidence suggests that these helmets were often worn pushed back on the head to reveal the face during times of peace, for





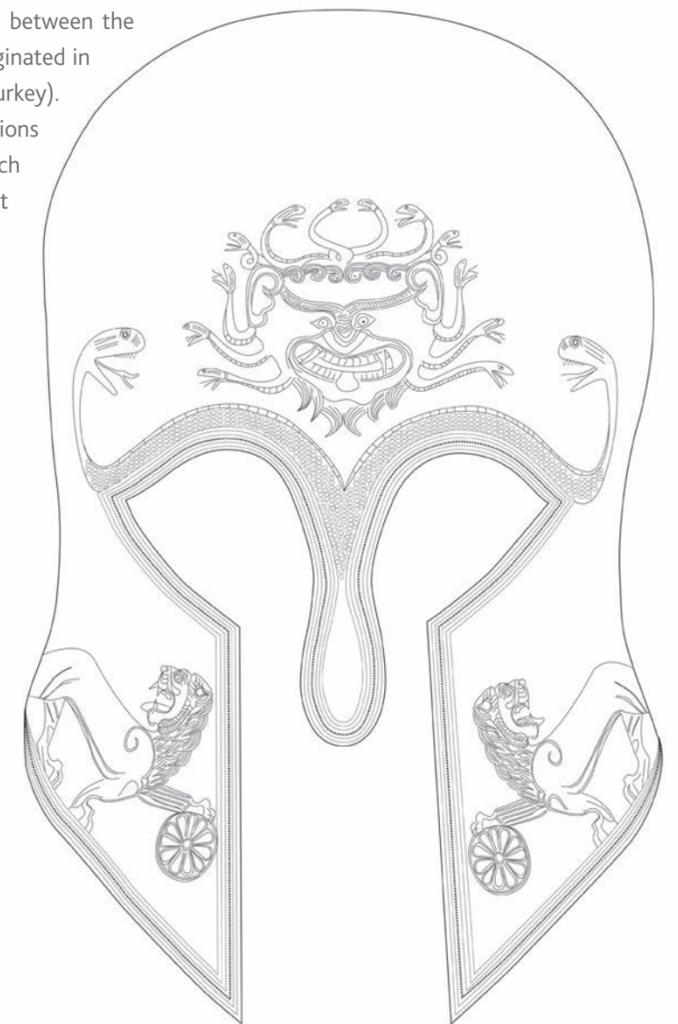
example during processions and festivities. The style's popularity endured for hundreds of years throughout Archaic and Classical Greece, and is commonly found on Greek and Roman sculpture of both mortal heroes and divine gods, drawing associations with a noble and glorious past.³ The Greeks revered it as a helmet type worn by valiant Homeric conquerors, and it was adopted by the Romans in their love of all things Hellenistic.

Because of its deep bronze colour and lack of verdigris from oxidization, this exceptional helmet was probably discovered in water, perhaps as part of a shipwreck hoard. Its ornate decoration and excellent condition make this helmet one of the finest surviving pieces of early Greek armour known.

A strikingly similar helmet was found in Haifa Bay, Israel, during construction works in 2007, and is now in the National Maritime Museum in Haifa, Israel (1). It is supposed that it belonged to a Greek mercenary working for the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho II, as no Greek colonies existed in Israel at the time, meaning that probably a band of travelling warriors from Ionia accidentally dropped it overboard. The similarities between the two helmets suggest that this example probably also originated in an early Greek colony in Ionia (modern-day west-coast Turkey). The Haifa helmet contains decorative beasts – snakes, lions and a peacock's tail are all inscribed into the surface, which still contains traces of its original gold-leaf – hinting that our example may once have been covered in the same precious metal.



1 Corinthian helmet, bronze, National Maritime Museum, Haifa, Israel



ROMAN HUNTING-SCENE MOSAIC

ROMAN, 1ST–2ND CENTURY AD

STONE, HEIGHT 126 CM, WIDTH 160 CM



PROVENANCE

Private French collection, early 1980s

NOTES

- 1 K.M.D. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.2.
- 2 D.L. Balch, *Roman Domestic Art and Early House Churches*, Mohr Siebeck, 2008, p.37.

An exquisite Roman mosaic, full of vigour and movement, this image represents the Roman love of hunting and blood sports. The multi-coloured composition, set into a white ground, springs to life as a leopard pounces on a wild boar, biting into its flank, with red blood streaming fresh from the wound. Finely detailed with bright pigmentation, the fur of the animals has been beautifully depicted, with their musculature carefully defined to project a three-dimensional image.

This mosaic would have once graced the private villa of a wealthy Roman. Popularized in Hellenistic Greece during the third and second centuries BC and later adopted by Romans, these mosaics decorated interiors from Libya to Britain in the ancient world. They provide evidence for the evolution of pictorial, figurative and ornamental styles and compositions over an unbroken span of more than a thousand years and give great insight into the lives and tastes of those who commissioned them.¹ They exist in a huge variety of colours, styles and subjects. This example was probably from North Africa – a region where both the beasts would have been indigenous and the materials to make the earthen-coloured tesserae would have been abundant. The boar was a very popular motif, often hunted by man or beast, and has been found in many surviving bronze statues, mosaics and engravings at the Roman city of Pompeii. This fine example typifies the mosaics of the first to second centuries AD, when wild beasts were highly popular and depicted in a stylized manner. Realism and depth of field have been abandoned in favour of drama and evocative form.

Surviving in excellent condition, this mosaic would have been commissioned for someone with a love for hunting, nature and sport. It has been suggested that such mosaics had apotropaic powers – the beasts warding off both evil spirits and chancing thieves, while simultaneously suggesting the omnipresent wrath and power of the patron.² The tension in the scene, depicting the moment at the end of an animal's life, would have been gazed upon by its patron during domestic festivities and no doubt provided them with great pride in showing it to visitors.

A late Roman mosaic in the British Museum in London, also from North Africa, shows a wild boar being pursued by a domesticated hunting dog wearing a collar. Dating some 300 years after this example, the British Museum mosaic displays the loss of detail and rhythm that later mosaics exhibit compared to their earlier counterparts. It highlights the popularity of this type of hunting motif as well as the excellent condition, superb drama and fine craftsmanship of this example.

CYCLADIC MARBLE IDOL OF A FEMALE

LATE SPEDOS VARIETY, CIRCA 2500–2400 BC
HEIGHT 21.6 CM



PROVENANCE

Barbier-Mueller collection, Geneva (above)
With Galerie de Monbrison, Paris, 1969

PUBLISHED

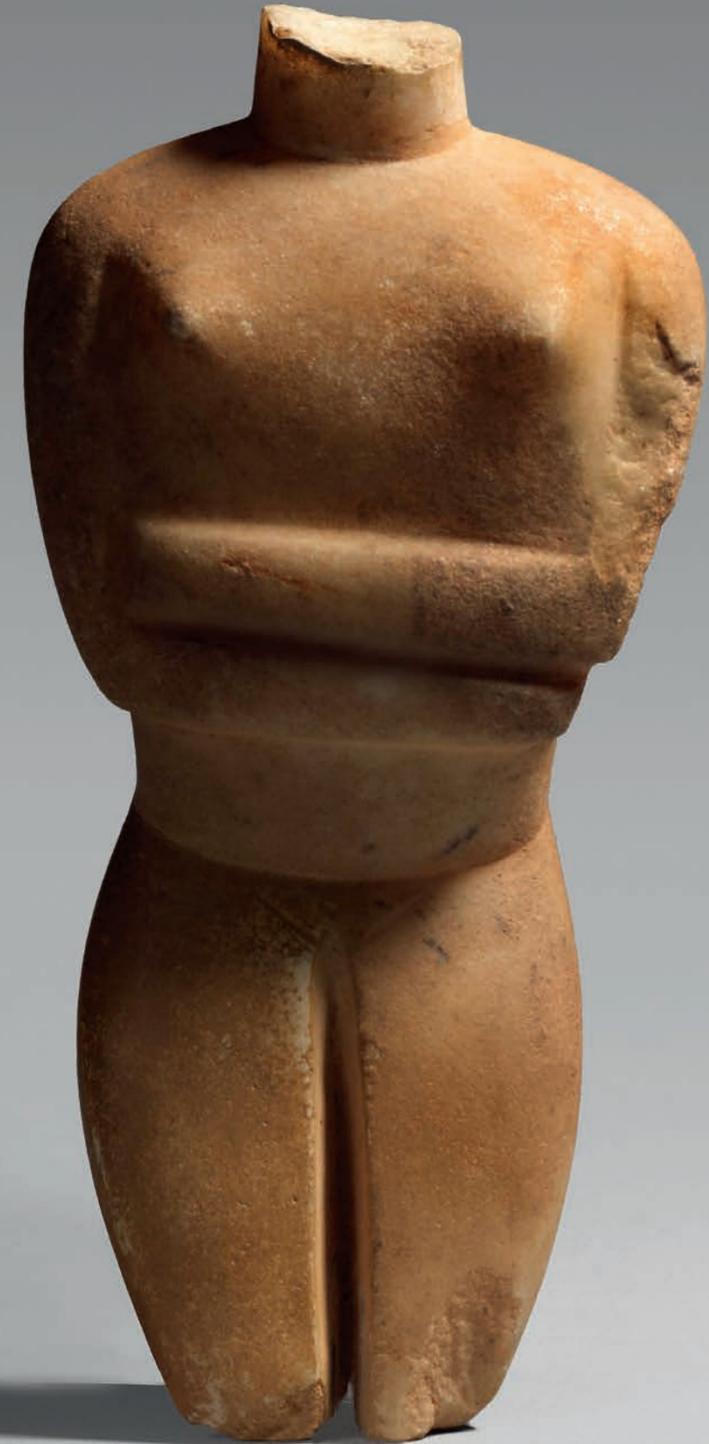
A.D. Marmo, *Sculture cicladiche del Museo Barbier-Mueller*, Fondazione Galleria Gottardo, 1994, no. 27

Cycladic art arose from a group of islands in the Aegean Sea, most notably Melos, Naxos, Paros, Tenos and Andros. Aside from rock-cut tombs, very little Cycladic architecture survives. Many mysterious carved marble idols do survive, however – no two alike, ranging from just a few centimetres in height to life-size. The task of crafting such a hard material into the fine and smooth shapes that we see with this idol would have required great skill.

The high point of Cycladic art came in the Early Helladic II period (2500–2200 BC), during which this fine example was made. Cut from a single, thin rectangular slab of marble using tools of bone and copper, all but essential detail in portraying form have been left out, so not as to split the fragile marble. The final result is the sleek, abstract style we see here, which came to dominate figurative idol-making for thousands of years.

This figure is of the Spedos type, which is characterized by a backwards-leaning oval head, prominent nose, long tube-like neck, sloping shoulders leading to arms tightly crossed in front of the abdomen, truncated with one on top of the other, and slender hips that turn into legs which bend at the knee.¹ Many theories have been advanced to explain the function of these idols – they have been found in graves alongside the deceased, but also in domestic situations. They may have been servants of the dead, substitutes for sacrifice, ancestor idols or even toys. Others suggest that they are particularly stylized interpretations of the Stone Age 'Mother Goddess' figure.² If they were originally painted with facial features on the marble, it has even been suggested they might represent funeral mourners, as the statues' bright red cheeks could reproduce the traditional scratched and beaten faces of the mourners. Their function, of which these early Bronze Age people left little clue, will never be fully known, adding to their enigma.

A marble idol in the British Museum of the Spedos type is almost exactly the same, though with noticeable differences in the depth of the carving





NOTES

- 1 P.G. Preziosi, *Early Cycladic Sculpture; An Introduction*, revised edn, Los Angeles, Getty Publications, 1995, p.50.
- 2 C.F.C. Hawkes, *The Prehistoric Foundations of Europe to the Mycenaean Age*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2014, p.89.

and the degree of the angles. Whilst very clearly belonging to the same group, no two were exactly the same, suggesting they may have been made to order and with a specific representation or purpose in mind. The size may have also been an indicator of the owner's wealth. The damage to both highlights the fragility at the point of neck and knee in such objects, whilst also signifying the importance of this example as a museum-quality piece. Early statues such as these helped inspire twentieth-century art movements such as Cubism and Abstraction, and have been considered historical works of modern art for their radically inventive forms.



1 Carved female marble idol, Cycladic, Spedos type, 2700–2300 BC, h. 24 cm, British Museum, London, 1904.0605.4

SARD INTAGLIO, IN 19TH-CENTURY COLLECTOR'S FRAME

ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT, 1ST CENTURY BC
 HEIGHT OF FRAME 2.7 CM, WIDTH 2.1 CM



PROVENANCE
 Private collection
 On loan to W.G. Thorpe FSA for presentation at the Society of Antiquaries, London, 1901
 Previously in the Reichardt collection, circa 1900

EXHIBITED
 Society of Antiquaries, London, 1901

Sard is a deep orange stone, similar to carnelian but often darker and of much harder quality. It was employed throughout antiquity for making stamps and seals because of its strength, which allowed it to be finely carved. The art of engraving gemstones can be traced to ancient Greece, to the eighth century BC. Techniques were passed down to the Egyptians and then to the Romans, and remained popular right through to the Renaissance.

The exquisite double-sided example in the centre of the frame shows on one side the image of an eagle devouring a hare – the symbol from 700 BC of Agrigentum, one of the leading cities of the ancient world, in modern-day Sicily. The reverse depicts a robed woman flanked by columns on either side, described as representative of the 'City of Alexandria, 3rd century BC'



- NOTES**
- 1 D. Plantzos, *Hellenistic Engraved Gems*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999, p.12.
 - 2 L. Burn, *Hellenistic Art: From Alexander the Great to Augustus*, Los Angeles, Getty Publications, 2004, p.61.
 - 3 M. Stansbury-O'Donnell, *A History of Greek Art*, Hoboken NJ, John Wiley & Sons, 2015, p.378.

– another of the great ancient metropolises. Hellenistic intaglio seals drew on a wide range of iconography, developing new subjects and styles while still remaining faithful to the Classical tradition in form and technique.¹

It is possible that this intaglio was once set in a ring or pendant, worn around the neck of an important official and used as a personal seal to certify a document as legitimate.² From the city of Alexandria, this carved gem could perhaps indicate diplomatic ties between two ancient cities, or act as a talisman, invoking protection from both provinces and their respective kings and gods.³ The fine level of minute detail is testament to the carver's skill – clearly versed in working hard materials. His workshop would have produced custom intaglios specific to each patron's needs, cut with minuscule chisels and blades.

The Getty Collection in Malibu has a fine carnelian intaglio from the same period, set within a ring depicting a female figure also flanked by a column, holding a cornucopia and scepter, identifying her as a divine patron, perhaps Aphrodite (1). The two examples speak of a civilization with a strong belief in protective amulets and a love of fine crafts. Though of similar size and style to the Getty example, this unusual double-sided intaglio – worthy of a museum collection – was more likely to be set into a pendant, allowing both sides to be seen.

Set within a beautiful nineteenth-century collector's frame that has on the reverse a hand-written note by the original owner describing the object and a note from its showing in the 1901 exhibition at the London Society of Antiquaries, this fine intaglio has been the pride of private collections for over 200 years.



1 Ring with intaglio gem, 220–100 BC, gold and carnelian, h. 3.8 cm, J. Paul Getty Collection, Getty Villa, Malibu, California, USA

MONUMENTAL OLIVE-GREEN GLASS 'LOTUS-BUD' VESSEL

ITALY OR EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN, LATE 1ST CENTURY AD
HEIGHT 21 CM

PROVENANCE

Benzian collection, 1986–94
James Bomford collection, assembled 1960–78

EXHIBITED

Ancient Glass: The Bomford Collection of Pre-Roman & Roman Glass, City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, 1976

PUBLISHED

The Benzian Collection of Ancient and Islamic Glass, Sotheby's, London, 7 July 1994, lot 9
Antiquities sale, Sotheby's, London, 14 July 1986, lot 64

With its rich, translucent yellow-green colour and exquisite decorative motif, this glass beaker is a truly fine example of glassworking from antiquity, exemplifying the Roman mastery of the craft. Six rows of eight graduated triple-tiered almond-shaped bosses in relief span the outside of the vessel, with two concentric wheel-incised circles and a horizontal rib forming the base. It was made using a mould-blowing technique. The molten glass, made from a sand composite, would have been poured into moulds and fused into these intricate shapes, then left to cool before being removed and polished.¹

The vessel was made during the first century AD, during Augustus's stabilization of the Empire, when glass production excelled. New Roman furnace innovations allowed exquisite objects to be made, the likes of which had never been seen before. Having been excavated in industrial, funerary, religious and domestic contexts, in blue, red, green and clear, and in a variety of shapes, adorned with figural, abstract and floral motifs and covered in writing, it is clear that glass exploded in popularity both as a functional material and as a decorative craft.² Roman glass was also widely exported, as far as Afghanistan, India and even China.

The monumental size of this glass represents a serious undertaking by the artisan – creating something of this scale from such fragile material and with limited technologies was a defiant feat. This example is among the largest of its type, making it a rare survivor and certainly of museum quality. The technical difficulty of making this beaker signifies its great expense. It would have no doubt graced a fine Roman dining-table inside a superb villa during antiquity. When filled with wine, the colour, which is unusual for Roman glass and probably made by adding lead, would transform from a vibrant olive-green to a deep maroon, adding an element of theatre to its practical use. The maker of this vessel had a complex understanding of symmetry, proportion and colour.





NOTES

- 1 M.E. Stern, *Roman Mold-blown Glass: The First through Sixth Centuries*, exh. cat., The Toledo Museum of Art, 1995, p.22.
- 2 S.J. Fleming, *Roman Glass: Reflections of Everyday Life*, Penn State, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology, 1997, p.7.
- 3 H.W. Catling and P.R. Moorey, *Ancient Glass, Jewellery and Terracottas from the Collection of Mr and Mrs James Bomford*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 1971.

A similar example of this type of glass beaker with almond droplets exists in the British Museum in London (1). Lacking the depth and clarity of colour, refinement of execution and monumental size of this example, it highlights the range of quality such glassware could feature, and illustrates the scarcity and value of this example. The similarity in design between the two suggests this was a particular type of beaker produced throughout the Empire that would have been a familiar sight in the households of the elite.

NOTE ON THE PROVENANCE

This vessel was once in the famous Benzian collection of ancient and Islamic Glass – an outstanding museum-quality collection built by Hans Benzian (1917–1998) and his wife Gertie (1921–2007), which was auctioned off in a dedicated sale by Sotheby's in 1994 that fetched over \$2 million. The Swedish couple, who lived near Lucerne in Switzerland, purchased many important pieces of ancient glass throughout the second half of the twentieth century, especially during their time living in Manhattan after the Second World War. In 1981 they loaned a substantial portion of the collection to the exhibition *3000 Jahre Glaskunst* at the Kunstmuseum, Lucerne. The 1994 sale was billed as the most important auction of ancient glass in a decade, and spanned from 1300 BC Mycenaean glass to 1100 AD Islamic glass across 200 pieces. Many works ended up in important museum collections, such as a fine first-century AD Roman beaker in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

Prior to this, the present vessel was in the collection of James Bomford (1896–1979), a distinguished antiquities collector. Amassed with the help of wife in the 1960s and 1970s, the Bomford glass collection consisted of mostly Roman pieces originating from Italy, Egypt, the Levant and Asia Minor, tracing the origins of glass production throughout the Classical world. Bomford exhibited many of his fine antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in 1971, later bequeathing the glass collection to Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery. Consisting of over 200 pieces, it is today maintained by the Bomford Trust, which supplements it with new acquisitions. Bomford generously supported the two museums throughout his life and is regarded as having greatly shaped their collections. Many important pieces from his antiquities collection remain in the permanent collections of the Ashmolean as well as in the British Museum in London, to which he donated a number of artefacts between 1961 and 1978.³



1 Dark green conical mould-blown beaker, Roman, excavated Cyzicus, Turkey, 1st–2nd century AD, h. 13.2 cm, British Museum, London, 1892/0613.50

MARBLE TORSO OF A GOD

ROMAN, 1ST–2ND CENTURY AD
HEIGHT 65 CM

PROVENANCE

Private collection, New York, 1990s

Private collection, kept in Geneva, 1980s

NOTES

¹ W.G. Moon, *Polykleitos, The Doryphoros and Tradition*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1995, p.11.

² S.L. Tuck, *A History of Roman Art*, Hoboken NJ, John Wiley & Sons, 2014, p.116.

Perhaps a youthful Apollo, this Roman marble statue typifies the highpoint of Classical sculpture. Leaning back on his right leg as his left hip pushes forward, he stands in a carefully articulated contrapposto pose – a dynamic movement developed by the ancient Greeks for their monumental bronze statues. With a chlamys (woollen cloak) over his chest, fastened in the centre with a large fibula, he cuts a powerful shape of almost exaggerated masculinity. His chiselled hip muscles and inflated pectorals suggest an idealized male beauty that can only be achieved by the eternally youthful gods. A gentle curl of long hair is still visible on each shoulder, suggesting that this is Apollo, son of Jupiter and Leto, the god of music, poetry, the arts and the sun. One of the twelve Olympian deities, Apollo was considered a model of youthful male beauty, embodying values deeply rooted in Classical antiquity.

This type of sculpture, with emphasized anatomy and precise geometry, is in the tradition of the Polykleitan school.¹ A Greek sculptor of the fifth century BC, Polykleitos wrote treatises on the virtues of harmonious and balanced sculptural forms to represent the human body. This finely carved torso is similar to his 440 BC bronze *Doryphoros* sculpture, which is known through surviving Roman marble copies, and in particular a fine surviving example from Herculaneum that dates to 150–120 BC, now in the Naples National Archaeological Museum, and another version in the Uffizi in Florence. It is quite possible that the original head of an athlete was swapped for that of Apollo. The highly skilled craftsman, who has laboured over the hard stone to create this strong yet calm rendering, has expertly captured the exquisite proportions and delicacy of the bronze original for a Roman market. This heroic stance was widely adopted as the pose for their statuary by patrons ranging from the winners of ancient games to the Emperor Augustus.² Originally painted and often holding bronze weapons, such statues were found throughout the Roman Empire, on both public and private display.



GREEK GOLD AND AGATE NECKLACE

HELLENISTIC PERIOD, 4TH–3RD CENTURY BC
LENGTH 48.9 CM

PROVENANCE

Private collection, 1990s

NOTES

- 1 C.A. Picón and S. Hemingway, *Pergamon and the Hellenistic Kingdoms of the Ancient World*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art Press, 2016, p.235.
- 2 R.A. Higgins, *Greek and Roman Jewellery*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980, p.165.



1 Gold, agate and garnet necklace, late Hellenistic period, 1st century BC, l. 31.8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1994.230.4-6

Formed from a length of three-fold, double loop-in-loop chain, adjoined to a gold oval box bezel set with a bevelled oval stone, this stunning necklace radiates quality. With its simplicity of design, it could easily be a piece of contemporary jewellery. The beautiful piece of carved and polished agate has a deep, eye-catching reddish-purple colour. The necklace would have been worn over 2,000 years ago by a wealthy Greek woman, at festivities and rituals throughout her life. Gold jewellery was often passed on as family heirlooms or adorned the dead in the burials of ancient Greece, and is occasionally listed in temple inventories as a religious offering.¹

The ancient Greeks were renowned for their mastery of jewellery-making, and in particular their goldsmithing. Expert craftsmen, with a complex knowledge of stones and metals, created exquisite, understated adornments for the female population. Hellenistic Greek jewellery spread with the conquests of Alexander the Great and was much admired throughout the Mediterranean and further afield. With the conquering of Persia vast amounts of gold came in to circulation and, along with it, new metalworking techniques that were exported back to Greece. Workshops flourished, creating a Greek industry for jewellers, the best of whom were summoned by royal courts to make eye-catching pieces that would compete with other elite families' collections.² Therefore it is possible to admire this piece both as a necklace and as a fine work of art.

A similar gold and agate necklace is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It features a gold chain made of the same construction and an oval piece of deep red agate that hangs at the front (1). Slightly more decorative than this example, but lacking its beauty of simplicity, the Metropolitan necklace is part of a set with matching earrings, suggesting ours too may have once had matching accessories. Combined, these pieces speak of an ancient Greek love of beauty and refinement, and a passion for the fine crafts for which they quickly gained a reputation.



14

HITTITE MALE FIGURE

ANATOLIA, 1650–1200 BC
BRONZE, HEIGHT 22 CM

PROVENANCE

Private collection, UK, 1970s

NOTES

- 1 H. Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996, p.215.
- 2 D.G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*, Hoboken NJ, John Wiley & Sons, 2014, p.45.

The Hittites were an ancient Anatolian people who flourished during the Bronze Age. Evidence of their unique culture and language survives in many examples of cuneiform tablets, which provide a fascinating insight into the lives of the Hittites. The discovery by the German archaeologist Hugo Winkler of a cache of 10,000 cuneiform tablets in a royal archive during excavations in 1906 led to a much greater understanding of their civilization in the twentieth century.

Little is known of their worshipping practices, and no evidence survives of canonical scriptures or a centralized theological discourse. What we do have, however, are many stone and metal deity idols, which have been found in both funerary and temple complexes, in guises of both man and beast.¹ Archaeologists have been able to create a list of known Hittite deities – including a sun goddess, a storm god and a fate goddess – but they survive without names, since relief carvings and statues are very rarely inscribed with a title.

This beautifully rendered bronze figure is most probably one of these deities. The freestanding bronze statue is of a male, highly stylized and showing an understanding of geometric proportions in a purposeful abstraction of form into simple lines and shapes. He is slightly primitive in form; his gender has been signified by a shapely bump in bronze, and his nipples are smaller applied lumps. His prominent nose is pinched to a point, and his eyes are formed from the dents left by creating a thick brow. Tall and slender, with outstretched arms (that may have originally contained weapons or offerings), he cuts a serene but powerful shape, with an air of spirituality.

Originally coated with a layer of silver, of which some remains, the figure also once had silver bangles adorning his left arm. We can safely assume that, having once been entirely coated in silver, this statue would have been of great value and importance. Whoever owned it would have





1 Figurine of a man with his hand on his hip, Hittite, found in Turkey, copper alloy, h. 4.76 cm, British Museum, London, 1948.1117.1

no doubt greatly revered the object, whether in a domestic setting, as a funerary offering or in a religious context of dancing and singing during a festival to honour the gods.² This statue's unique properties provide an important yet cryptic glimpse into the religious and socio-economic workings of the Hittite Empire.

The British Museum in London contains a similar Hittite figure, which is now missing the lower two thirds but would have originally been of much the same size (1). Made from a copper alloy, the figure has one hand on his hip and the other extended forward, displaying the same dexterity as this. The facial features are strikingly similar, with bulbous eyes and nose, in unique, simple and stylized forms. The comparable size and appearance of these two suggests a Hittite disposition for metal votives, which would have offered a degree of portability and been recognizable throughout the Empire.



PHOENICIAN SARCOPHAGUS

ANCIENT LEVANT, 5TH–4TH CENTURY BC
LIMESTONE, HEIGHT 74.9 CM

PROVENANCE

Private collection since 1984

PUBLISHED

Antiquities sale, Sotheby's, New York, 8 June 1984

NOTES

- 1 S. Moscatti, *The Phoenicians*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2001, p.355.
- 2 G. Markoe, *Phoenicians*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000, p.138.
- 3 Anthropoid coffin lid of Sidonian type, with male in Egyptian-style headdress, with two hand-grips by shoulders, Phoenician, 5th century BC, white marble, l. 228.6 cm, British Museum, London, 1864.118.1.

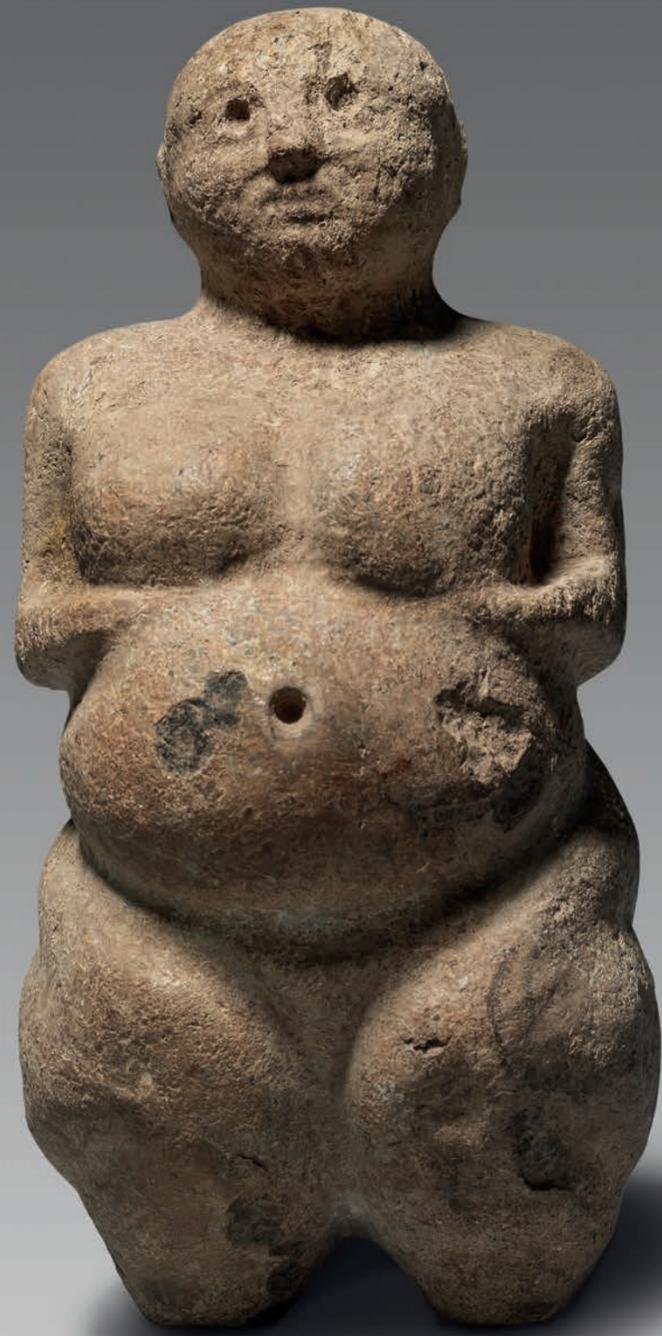
The Phoenicians were an ancient Semitic people who inhabited much of modern-day Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Syria and Palestine between 1500 and 300 BC, when the empire fell to Persian rule and was split into four vassal kingdoms. Phoenician art is notable for its hybridity of foreign cultures – primarily Egyptian, Greek and Assyrian – as traders and soldiers ventured into new lands, returning laden with exotic goods, techniques and tastes. Both in their appearance and their use, Phoenician stone sarcophagi are Egyptian in inspiration. At a certain moment between the fifth and fourth centuries BC, however, Greek influence intervened, and Hellenistic realism and drama began to take over from Egyptian abstraction of form, symmetry and calmness.¹ This fantastically preserved upper portion of a monumental anthropoid sarcophagus displays the beginnings of these new influences – for instance in the much exaggerated round head – but predates the total abandonment of the old style, making it an important piece.

The sarcophagus is striking in its powerful serenity, with huge, almond eyes and a large stylized face with a neutral expression, exuding calmness in the presence of death and expectancy of the afterlife. The prominent nose, sharp brow, incised mouth and protruding ears, caricature-like in their rendering, exhibit a skill for and love of symmetry. A simple tripartite wig with tapering lappets, greatly influenced by Egyptian fashion, arches in a crescent across the forehead and behind the ears and falls forward over the shoulders.

Archaeology has been helpful in recreating Phoenician burial rites, for which textual resources are scant. Ritual lamentations took place, with the tearing of hair, beating of breasts and wearing of sackcloth, and the carbonized remains of food and broken tableware suggest ritual banquets were held at the tomb, before libations were poured and incense was burned to inaugurate its closure.²

The British Museum contains a Phoenician sarcophagus from the fifth century BC with similarly distinct oval eyes, thick brows pinched to a point and Egyptian-style incised hair tucked behind the ears.³ The complete nature of the British Museum example suggests how this lid would have once fitted within its monumental arrangement.





16

ANATOLIAN STONE STEATOPYGOUS FIGURE

CENTRAL ASIA, CIRCA 6TH MILLENNIUM BC
HEIGHT 15.8 CM

PROVENANCE
Private collection since 1970

Carved in generous proportions with a swollen abdomen in the late stages of pregnancy, and with broad hips, corpulent thighs and large breasts, this arresting stone figure revels in the miracle of childbirth. The woman's well-modelled arms are bent at the elbow and tucked in at the side, as if presenting her bosom that will nurture the imminent infant, whilst simultaneously protecting her belly that envelopes it. Her deeply articulated navel and pubic triangle have been carefully defined by incised grooves, with shallow depressions on the surface to convey pubic hair. Her face has lovingly modelled eyes, nose, lips and ears that imbue her with a tranquil personality. Worthy of any museum collection, this fine specimen of an important type of statue highlights the significance of art in pre-literate societies.

There has been much scholastic debate regarding the role of female carved figurines during the Neolithic and Upper Palaeolithic periods.¹ During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was argued that these figures depicted pregnant females, and were celebratory votives concerning new life, but it was debated whether this represented females as a positive powerful life-giving force or as a biologically determined facet of reproduction.² A more recent proposal, however, is that these could be symbols of contemporary eroticism with greatly enlarged stomachs, thighs, hips and breasts, while their hands, arms, lower legs and feet are very much reduced in proportion. A case could also be argued for them being carved by women sculptors as apotropaic idols.

Archaeological evidence in 2016 from the site of Çatalhöyük in modern-day Turkey suggests they were items created for a one-time use, as many have been found in refuse pits. Their lack of a flat base means they were probably not erected but passed hand to hand during a ceremony or were intended to be interred. They have also been found buried under houses alongside the skeletons of important both female and male members of



1 Female statue, Anatolian, 6,500–6,000 BC, marble, photo courtesy of Çatalhöyük Research Project



2 Statuette of a seated nude representing the 'Mother Goddess', from Çatalhöyük, Neolithic Period, Anatolian Museum of Civilization, Ankara, Turkey

NOTES

- 1 M. Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe, 7000 – 3500 BC: Myths, Legends and Cult Images*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1974, p.152.
- 2 C. Serei, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess in Early Anatolia*, Oxford University Press, 1957, vol.1, p.8.

society. A similar figure was discovered in a grave during 2016 excavations alongside skeletons whose skulls had been traded and a piece of highly valued obsidian, suggesting these statues, although perhaps only used once, were of great importance (1). However, made by a people who predate any form of writing, their purpose may forever remain a mystery.

A comparable statue also exists in the collection of the Museum of Anatolian Civilization in Ankara, Turkey, where it is described as a 'Mother Goddess' (2). The swollen stomach is more naturalistic on this Ankara statue and it is missing its head. It has been decorated with abstract forms, suggesting this example may have once been decorated too.



BRONZE BELT-PLAQUE WITH STAG

CAUCASUS, LATE 1ST MILLENNIUM BC
HEIGHT 13 CM, WIDTH 13 CM

PROVENANCE

Private collection, 1960s

NOTES

- 1 M. Rostovtzeff, 'Bronze Belt-Clasps and Pendants from the North Caucasus', *Bulletin of The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, vol.17, no.2, p.36.
- 2 E.C. Bunker et al., *Animal Style Art: From East to West*, New York, The Asia Society, pls.32a and 32b, pp.46, 47.



1 Stag belt-clasp, Transcaucasia, 1st–2nd century AD, bronze, h. 11.4 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 21.166.5

Located between the Black and Caspian seas, the Caucasus is a mountainous region where Asia meets Europe and was a major trading route between east and west in the ancient world. Home to many ancient kingdoms, including the Assyrian, Colchis and Achaemenid empires, the area has a unique hybrid identity and diverse history that has borne exquisite creative output over the centuries. As it was a land rich in mineral and metal deposits, its workshops produced some of the finest arts and crafts of antiquity.

This enchanting bronze belt-plaque features a three-dimensional openwork design of a stag in profile, with its head raised, full of poise and power. Its bulbous body, which has been chased into the bronze from the rear, has tense musculature. Decorative vines and plants swirl around the wild beast and a thick, herringbone border frames the design.

The plaque shows a clear admiration for the animal and its majesty – representing the 'bestial forces of the steppes, of the forest and of the mountains' – and would have no doubt graced the clothes of an important person, worn with much pride and perhaps believed to have apotropaic powers.¹ Stylized animals with small waists and arched necks and backs are also common on bronze tools, including axes and pins, and have been found across Northern Caucasus, Armenia and Azerbaijan from the Bronze Age onwards.² These distinctive belt-plaques, their purpose identifiable from a loop on the rear, have mostly been found in modern-day Georgia, dating from the end of the first millennium BC to the early first millennium AD.

A similar bronze example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, exemplifies the style (1). When viewed side by side it is clear that these stag buckles were idiosyncratic to the region, coming from closely related workshops for a particular market. They speak of a trend for depicting the stag as an adornment, perhaps as a zoomorphic amulet. Less fine in its modelling but of similar condition, the Metropolitan version proves this example is worthy of a world-class museum collection.



18

MONUMENTAL BACTRIAN SILVER VESSEL

WESTERN CENTRAL ASIA, CIRCA 3RD-2ND MILLENNIUM BC
HEIGHT 17 CM, DIAMETER 20 CM

PROVENANCE

Private US collection, kept in Switzerland,
1960s

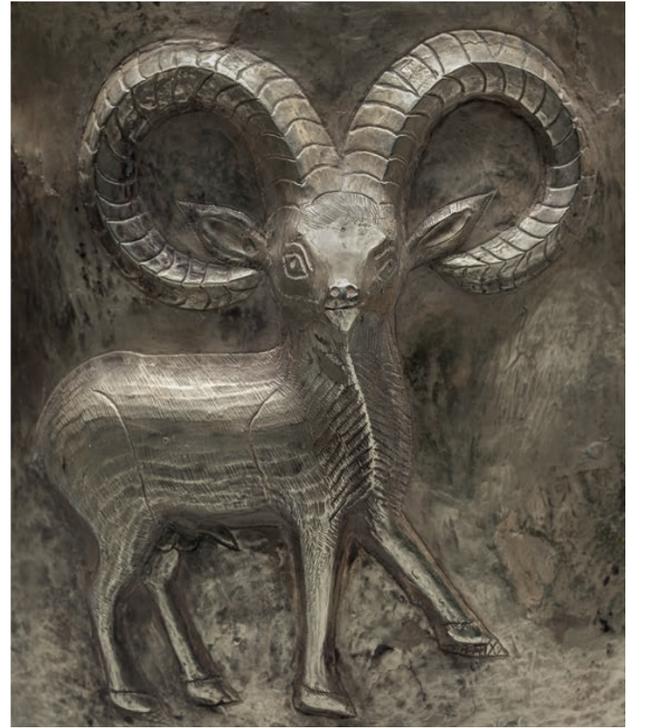
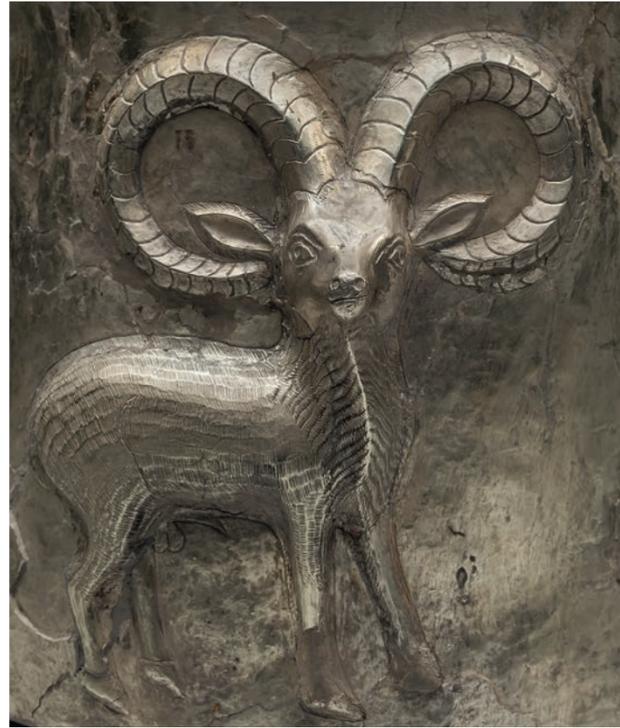
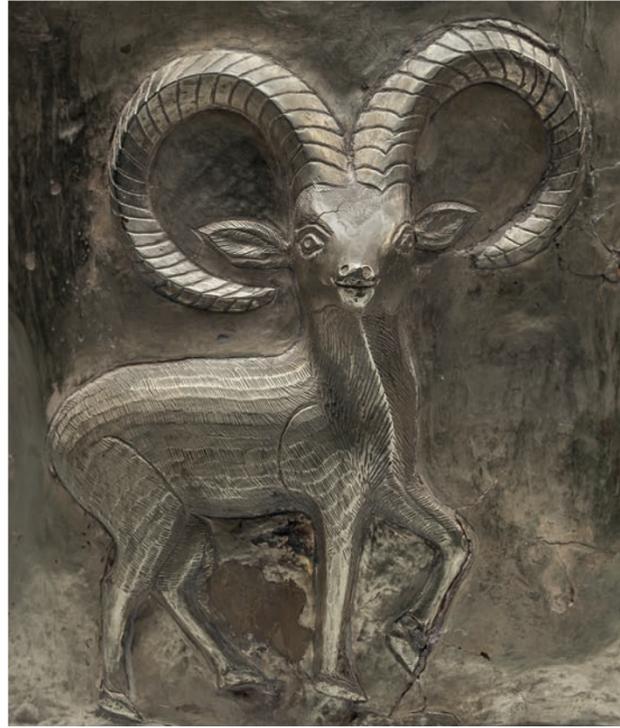
PUBLISHED

Antiquities sale, Christie's, New York,
7 December 2000, lot 684

Ancient Bactria was a region located between the Hindu Kush mountain range and the Amu Darya river, covering the flat plains of modern-day Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. A prominent Bronze Age culture, Bactria flourished between 2200 and 1700 BC. Writing in circa 400 BC, the early Greek historian Ctesias described their king Oxyartes and his battles with the Assyrians, predating the Trojan war by some thousand years. Originally populated by Indo-Iranian tribespeople who moved to the fertile lands, the area became populous and wealthy on the fabric, spice and precious stone and metal trading routes between the east and west. A unique artistic culture developed, involving animal and ancestor worship, which has left behind a material culture of intriguing and idiosyncratic votive idols and vessels, the most exceptional of which are these cylindrical silver vessels with low relief figurative scenes. These splendid displays of ancient central Asian silverworking came from merely a handful of workshops, or possibly even just a single one, in ancient Bactria.¹

Monumental in size, this magnificent vessel is one of only a handful that has been attributed to Bronze Age Bactria. The sheer skill of the ancient craftsmen and their ability to observe and capture the essence of an animal through a hybrid of both stylized and naturalistic techniques shines through. Hammered from a single huge piece of silver, the main field displays a band of four two-dimensional bodies of ibexes, each striding around the edge of the bowl. The body of each ibex has been shaped by hammering the reverse of the silver sheet to create a low-relief design in a technique known as repoussé. Details have then been chased in with a small tool. Each head is turned frontally on a profile body, and a sense of depth has been created by placing one front and back leg behind the other, showing an early cognitive disposition towards realism. Each face has been deeply hammered to form a muzzle that stands proudly from the surface of the vessel. The large circular horns, detailed with chevrons, taper in almost







NOTES

- 1 J. Aruz, R. Wallenfels (eds.); *Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium BC from the Mediterranean to the Indus*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003, p.365, no.257.
- 2 M. Tosi, R. Wardak, 'The Fullol Hoard: A New Find from Bronze-Age Afghanistan', *East and West*, vol.22, nos.1/2, 1972, pp.9–17.
- 3 J.P. O'Neill (ed.), *Ancient Art from the Shumei Family Collection*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1997, figs.5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13.

a full circle from the animal's head above small ears. An ibex's horns could never exist in such a way naturally, being too unwieldy for the animal to manage, yet, stylized as they are here, they imbue the animal with the virtues of strength, fertility and majesty. The physical power and allure of each beast has been beautifully captured and marvellously emphasized, creating a bowl that is imbued with a playful character. It is perhaps for these reasons that we find the ibex depicted on ancient Bactrian metalwork including weaponry and jewellery, often alongside beasts endowed with similar characteristics, including stags, antelopes, boars and horses.²

Little is known of the intended use of such vessels – it could have been for ceremonial use, perhaps even in a ritual associated with the ibex in a form of dedication, sacrifice or bloodletting. However, it could also have been intended as a piece of decorative practical houseware for a particularly wealthy individual – maybe a king or member of his court. The sheer volume of silver present and the fine level of craft suggest this item would have been highly prized by its owner, whatever the intention. It would have clearly and instantly indicated to any onlooker that the possessor was someone of substantial importance.

Several other known vessels of this type exist – the Shumei family collection now based in the Miho Museum in Japan contains several fine examples of contemporary and later Bactrian metal vessels with repoussé design.³ It has two hammered silver Bactrian vessels of the same shape – one decorated with repoussé human figures in an agricultural ceremony, the other with a hatched crenellated design, both from the third to second millennia BC. These two vessels combined with the present vessel reveal a Bactrian love of decorative schemes in a wide array of designs, and testify to a clear effort by the artisans for artistic exploration. An electrum (an alloy of gold and silver) goblet also in the Miho Museum has a repoussé decorative scheme of raptors around the outer surface, in a highly stylized and repetitive manner much like ours, but has no three-dimensional detailing. A second electrum vessel, however, in the form of a conical cup, contains a series of bulls processing around the vessel. Although again lacking the three-dimensional aspect of ours, of under half the size and of much cruder execution, it highlights our work as a particularly unique and beautiful example of Bactrian silverworking. This ibex vessel exhibits the creative force coming from these early silver workshops, which were keen to create each vessel as an individual work of art by exploring techniques and breaking traditions. Unparalleled in any museum, this piece would take pride of place in any collection of ancient art.



1 Cylindrical vessel with animals, Bactria, Bronze Age, 3rd–2nd millennium BC, silver, h. 9.7 cm, d. 11.2 cm, Miho Museum, Kyoto

EXCEPTIONAL BRONZE MASK

WITH FIVE SILVER EARRINGS ON EACH SIDE
LURISTAN, 1ST MILLENNIUM BC
HEIGHT 20 CM, WIDTH 16.5 CM

PROVENANCE

Private collection, 1980s
Private collection, 1960s

Luristan is a province in Western Iran, amongst the Zagros Mountains. The area is known for having produced a range of bronze artefacts during the Early Iron Age, which encompass finials, horse trappings and belt buckles.¹ Masks, however, such as this fine example, are exceedingly rare. These bronze artefacts shed a fascinating light on these nomadic people of the first millennium in Luristan, of which we know little. Their origins remain unknown, although they may have been migrating Persians, and their religion remains a mystery.

Bronze artefacts have mostly been recovered during archaeological excavations throughout the twentieth century.² Often including areas of openwork, the bronzes relate to early Scythian art and also show Assyrian and Elamite influences in the plasticity of their moulded figures and their 'primitive yet ultramodern' appearance.³ The pieces are often zoomorphic in style and of a portable nature to suit the people's migratory needs.

This striking museum-quality mask represents a superlative example of the bronze work of Luristan and its craft. Its sheer size suggests both a monetary value – in the quantity of bronze necessary for such an object – but also a wealth of technical skill employed by the artisan who made it – in the alloying, styling, moulding and decoration of such an item. Cast with exceptional attention to detail, the mask has a stylized face, with oval eyes, each rimmed with an incised line that may refer to make-up, and arched brows formed from bronze moulding that meet in the middle at the bridge of the nose, which is wide and pointed. The mouth has been incised with a horizontal slit and around the neck run four incised bands that indicate the wearing of two well-defined tight necklaces. The mask has a serene and impassive expression, simultaneously frightening and playful, and projects the image of someone important – perhaps a warrior deity.



1 Luristan bronze mask, 800–700 BC, Musée Barbier-Mueller, Geneva (published in Vollenweider 1966, p.63, no.39)



One of the highlights of the mask are the five silver earrings that hang from each ear. Starting from the tip of the ear, small circular holes have been pierced through the thick bronze, running down to the lobe. Through each has been threaded and looped a band of silver. The precious nature of the metal indicates a particularly wealthy patron. The silver earrings would jangle as the object was moved, and reflect brightly in light, especially in contrast to the surface of the bronze, bringing the mask to life. The bronze has acquired a beautiful rich patina over the millennia, due to the alloy of copper and tin used in its creation, and it now exudes a radiant green hue.

Little is known of the intended use of such mask. The reverse, however, is hollow, suggesting it may have been worn as part of a costume for rituals or as a funerary mask. Many Luristan bronzes have been recovered from grave deposits, suggesting that these were ceremonial items to be interred with the deceased, perhaps for use in an afterlife.⁴

Several known Luristan masks exist, each varying in style. A bronze example now in a private collection features the same facial stylings at this piece, with wide almond-shaped eyes and a pointed nose, but contains no facial openings or silver adornment and is less than half the size of the present mask, suggesting it was not intended to be worn and may have been part of a finial or an apotropaic talisman. A second mask, in the Musée Barbier-Mueller in Geneva (1), which was exhibited alongside the first in an exhibition at the Musée Rath, shares other parallels with this one, such as a rounded face, thick neck and heavy brow, but again is cruder in execution, with no openings or jewellery. A third example, a votive effigy, dating to the first millennium BC, shares the more similarities. Both examples have tapering necks that lead to full faces with prominent

NOTES

- 1 For a description and discussion of the various aspects of Luristan bronzes see L. vanden Berghe, *Het archeologisch Onderzoek naar de Bronscultuur van Luristan*, Paleis der Academiën, 1968, p.149.
- 2 O.W. Muscarella, *Bronze and Iron: Ancient Near Eastern Artifacts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988, p.114.
- 3 M.A. Dandamaev, V.G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.35.
- 4 R.F. Rhodes, *Eclectic Antiquity: The Classical Collection of the Sinite Museum of Art*, University of Notre Dame, 2010, p.13.

brow ridges and long pointed noses. Both also have eye-openings (although different in shape) and, crucially, have pierced ears, although the parallel only has one bronze ring per ear. Combined, these fascinating objects illustrate the creative force of the Luristan bronze workshops, who were clearly encouraged to experiment with form, function and material, and they offer an important insight into the way citizens of the province during the first millennium wished to display their beliefs. Our example stands out as a true masterpiece of the family, with exceptional quality and importance, and worthy of any great museum collection.

WHITE MARBLE MOUFLON

CENTRAL ASIA, EARLY 3RD–LATE 2ND MILLENNIUM BC
HEIGHT 6.5 CM, LENGTH 11 CM

PROVENANCE

With Aaron Gallery, 1992

NOTES

- 1 P. de Montebello, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Guide*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art Press, 1994, p.46.
- 2 H. Pittman, *Art of the Bronze Age: Southeastern Iran, Western Central Asia and the Indus Valley*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art Press, 1984, p.87.



1 Reclining mouflon, Indus Valley, 2600–1900 BC, marble, l. 28 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1978.58

Mouflon are a subspecies of wild sheep with reddy-brown, shorthaired coats with dark rear stripes and a lighter saddle, and large horns that curve almost an entire revolution. They have roamed the plains of central Asia for thousands of years and, as one of the two ancestors of domestic sheep, provided early civilizations with a plethora of resources, both physical and, as is evident from this object, spiritual. A mouflon motif is also found on stamp seals from this period, highlighting its cultural importance in the third and second millennia BC.

This highly stylized figurine depicts a mouflon proudly displaying its horns, alert and full of gusto. Its body has been sculpted with subtle contours that define its short tapered legs, while the under-slung horns project upwards from its triangular head. Pointed ears stand erect below the horns above deeply recessed large eyes and nostrils. The figure's legs curve underneath the torso in a resting position. Although lying down, it exudes a calm power, even an air of otherworldliness. It is cut from a single piece of white marble with red veins, reflecting the colour of the animal's fur. The artisan has carefully considered proportions and symmetry in creating this beautiful object, and the hard stone has been polished to a fine shine.

The object's small size suggests portability, perhaps as an apotropaic charm or burial good for nomadic peoples.¹ Such figurines have also been found as grave deposits, strengthening an argument for their religious importance.² Its sheer age, predating written communications, embodies it with a mysterious quality that will never be fully understood.

A similar marble figure of a mouflon is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Although clearly made by a different sculptor, it shares the pose, form and spirit of this example – evidence of their importance in these central Asian civilizations. Widely collected during the twentieth century, stylized sculptures such as these inspired artists like Pablo Picasso, the father of Cubism, who is known to have had many ancient artworks in his studio.



LURISTAN DAGGER

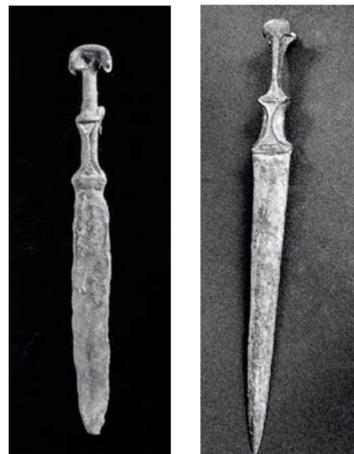
CIRCA 1ST MILLENNIUM BC
SILVER, GOLD AND BRONZE, LENGTH 41 CM

PROVENANCE

Noble Persian collection, 1930s

NOTE

¹ V.E. Piggot, *The Archaeometallurgy of the Asian Old World*, Penn State, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology, 1999, p.93.



¹ Dagger, Luristan, 10th–9th century BC, bronze, l. 10.3 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 66.31.3

² Dagger, Luristan, 10th–9th century BC, copper alloy, l. 35.6 cm, British Museum, London, 1973.1220.14

In exceptional condition and with a beautiful patina, this ancient dagger has a long double-edged blade of cast bronze that tapers towards the handle with an hourglass shape on either side and a palm-shaped pommel. The beautifully proportioned design shows influences of both Sumerian and Mesopotamian styles. The rounded silver palms have gold points and would have originally been adorned with precious metal. The use of silver and gold on such a weapon is very rare, and suggests the owner was an important and wealthy member of society – perhaps an esteemed warrior or king.¹ The small size of the dagger would have made it ideal to carry as a secondary weapon, hanging from a belt or tunic.

Covering much of modern-day western Iran, Luristan is a mountainous province that was home to many migrant tribes between the fourth and third millennia BC. Regularly at arms, the warring tribes of the Kassites, Iranian Medes and Persians all ruled the lands at various stages. From surviving archaeological evidence of unique and complex bronzeworking, we know the area produced some of the best metal goods from the Bronze Age. Spurred by continuous warfare, weaponry became one of the most important products being produced in Luristan workshops; it was both practical for combat and beautifully decorated for ceremonial purposes, as exemplified by this exquisite dagger. The Luristan bronze industry abruptly comes to an end at the beginning of the Achaemenid period for reasons unknown, deepening the allure of such intriguing pieces.

Similar Luristan daggers can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1) and the British Museum in London (2), but both examples are of much cruder shape and smaller in size, lack the precious metal adornments and are in much worse condition, all highlighting this as worthy of any museum collection.



MONUMENTAL PARTHIAN QUEEN WITH CROSSED ARMS

IRAN, 2ND CENTURY BC–2ND CENTURY AD
BRONZE, HEIGHT 33.5 CM

PROVENANCE

Private collection, 1960s



¹ Votive statue of a king wearing a crown, Iran, 2nd century BC–2nd century AD, bronze, h. 33.5 cm, private collection

The Parthian Empire (247 BC–224 AD), also known as the Arsacid Empire, spanned modern-day Iran and Iraq for almost half a millennium. Encompassing the trade routes along the Silk Road between the Han Dynasty in China and the Roman Empire, the area flourished as a centre of commerce and its material culture became a unique and distinct hybrid of eastern and western influences, which passed through with travelling merchants and their caravans, and its own geographical heterogeneous culture that merged Achaemenid, Hellenistic and Persian influences. Parthian rulers acknowledged themselves as the descendants of the Persian 'King of Kings' but also as 'Friends of the Greeks'. The Greek alphabet appeared on all their coinage, and they are known to have enjoyed Greek theatre, yet they adopted Persian dress, portraiture styles and monumental architecture traditions.¹

This unique bronze idol clearly exhibits a wide array of influences from across the ancient world, amalgamating in a truly idiosyncratic example of a votive of which very few are known. Depicting a female standing with her arms folded across her body, the figure was probably a fertility goddess – a long-standing and significant deity in Near Eastern traditions who appears on small finials which were produced in large quantities throughout Central Asia from the third to the second millennium BC.² Often this figure was seen adorned with jewellery, hands clasped in front of or across her breasts, and with highly stylized facial features such as those seen on this example.³

Cast in a solid piece of bronze with details soldered on afterwards, this female wears a long tunic with pleats around the hem indicated by incised lines, and a knotted belt across her waist. A similar style of tunic can be seen on the Parthian relief rock carvings at Tang-e Sarvak, with a pleated section falling between the knee and shin (worn over trousers by males) and with a belted waist.⁴ Her arms cross over her breasts, each wrist with





NOTES

- 1 V.S. Curtis, 'Parthian Culture and Costume', in J. Curtis (ed.), *Mesopotamia and Iran in the Parthian and Sasanian Periods: Rejection and Revival c.238 BC–AD 642*, British Museum Press, 2000, pp.23–34
- 2 H. Mahboubian, *The Art of Ancient Iran: Copper and Bronze*, Philip Wilson Publishers, 1997, p.125.
- 3 P. Ackerman, *The First Goddesses – The Persian Exhibition New York 1940*, Iranian Institute Press, 1940, p.3.
- 4 Tang-e Sarvak, Rock II, figure with betyl, repr. in T.S. Kawami, *Monumental Art of the Parthian Period in Iran*, BRILL, 1987, pl.47.
- 5 Bronze goddess, Iran, 1st–3rd centuries AD, h. 11.5 cm, Berlin State Museum, repr. in M.A.R. Colledge, *Parthian Art*, Paul Elek London, 1977, pl.11b.
- 6 Limestone funerary relief sculpture from Palmyra, reproduced in Colledge 1977, pl.30a.
- 7 Limestone religious relief with a Greek inscription from Dura-Europos depicting the cuirassed god Aphlad before a worshipping priest, h. 48 cm, reproduced in Colledge 1977, pl.33.
- 8 Votive statue of a Parthian king, h. 33.5 cm, repr. in M.L. Vollenweider et al., *Tresors de l'Ancien Iran*, Geneva Musée d'art histoire, 1966, cat.693, pl.72.
- 9 H.E. Mathiesen, *Sculpture in the Parthian Empire, A Study in Chronology, II Catalogue*, Aarhus University Press, 1992, fig.82, cat.226.

a bracelet and ending with clearly delineated fingers, similar in style to a small bronze Parthian deity idol in the Berlin Staatliche Museen, which also exhibits long curled hair and a thick necklace.⁵ Hanging from the necklace of large beads worn by this idol is a double pendant, which sits in the middle of her chest and mirrors the figure's pendant earrings. Above a thickly set neck is a large bronze head with highly stylized facial features and prominent jaw. The nose is sharp and pointed, the eyes are bulbous ovals beneath highly arched incised brows and the lips are caricature-like in their pursed appearance, much like the facial features of Parthian funerary monuments from Palmyra.⁶ The figure's hair is plaited in three splendid navel-length braids, with neat curls across the forehead much like a Parthian limestone relief from Dura-Europos that depicts the god Aphlad with a series of similar forehead curls, suggesting perhaps a religious association with the hairstyle.⁷ The powerful style of this idol, suggested through her stance, facial features and dress, is incredibly hypnotic. Her use is unknown, but such idols with fertility goddess associations have been found in archaeological contexts from temples and shrines to burials and refuse pits, suggesting a ceremonial purpose, maybe a one-time use, and perhaps apotropaic connotations. No doubt it would have once been used to invoke a female goddess and bring strength in to its original owner.

A particularly similar bronze Parthian idol of identical monumental size in a private collection depicts a king wearing a crown (1).⁸ Exhibiting the same unique stylized bronze facial features and jewellery with double pendant necklace, and belted tunic, the two may have come from the same workshop. Another similar Parthian female bronze votive is in the Museum für islamische Kunst in Berlin.⁹ Depicted naked, with arms meeting at her chest in a pose similar to ours, she displays the same attention to detail, prominent stylized features and long hair as ours but lacks the monumental size and fineness of execution. These statues together highlight the wide array of appearance in such objects, while also exemplifying ours as a truly one-of-a-kind that would take pride of place in any public or private collection. A deeply mysterious object, this rare idol sheds important light on the religious practices, tastes and beliefs of the Parthian people.

OFFERING BEARER

AMLASH, NORTHERN IRAN, CIRCA 1ST MILLENNIUM BC
TERRACOTTA, HEIGHT 28 CM

PROVENANCE

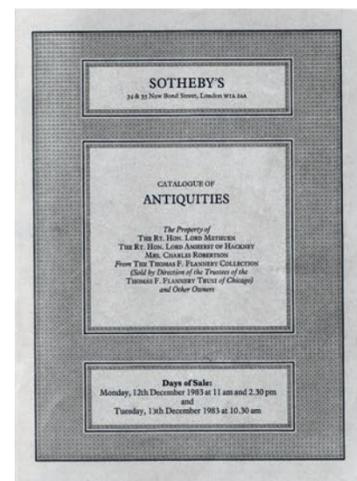
Aaron Gallery since 1950s, acquired by descent

PUBLISHED

Antiquities sale, Sotheby's, 12 December 1983,
lot 49

NOTES

- 1 J. Gabus, R.L. Junod, *Amlash Art*, Berne, Hallwag, 1967, p.5.
- 2 A. Ivanov, V. Lukonin, *Persian Art*, New York, Parkstone International, 2015, p.120.



Amlash culture flourished in the fertile mountains of northern Iran in the first millennium BC. A distinctive and intriguing material culture has come to light in recent decades, illuminating the civilization. Spanning the modern-day provinces of Gilan and Mazadaran, the Amlash culture produced an array of terracotta figurines ranging from highly stylized, almost abstract votive idols to zoomorphic libation vessels. Little is known of their religious customs, but surviving spiritual artefacts suggest daily rituals with a key role in their lives.

This museum-quality figure is a superb example of highly stylized Amlash clay-work. Impressively large and in excellent condition, the figure appears imbued with a celestial power. Larger figures were much more difficult to fire, meaning they needed great skill and care in their construction – only a highly versed artisan could make such an example as this.¹ The figure holds at arm's length a vessel into which libations or offerings may have been placed, employing him as a tool with which one could communicate with the other world. Charmingly simple in design, his eyes, ears and nose are all formed from small clay balls, and his body is rendered in simple forms, working each limb down in to its simplest shape, like an early form of the twentieth-century art movement Cubism. His pointed feet suggest a type of woollen boot, and the square shape of the crown of his head is suggestive of a ceremonial headdress – perhaps that of a priest.

The Amlash people left behind no evidence of writing, and archaeological evidence of statues, animal figurines, weapons and pottery is scant and often lacking context. What we can glean from objects such as this, therefore, is important for our understanding of these elusive people. They were clearly concerned with some form of supernatural power, had a social and religious hierarchy, and were skilled and creative artisans. Some terracotta artefacts have been found in grave burials, suggesting an association with death ritual, highlighting the importance of such objects for the Amlash people.²





ACHAEMENID BRONZE RHYTON

ASIA MINOR, 5TH CENTURY BC
HEIGHT 25 CM

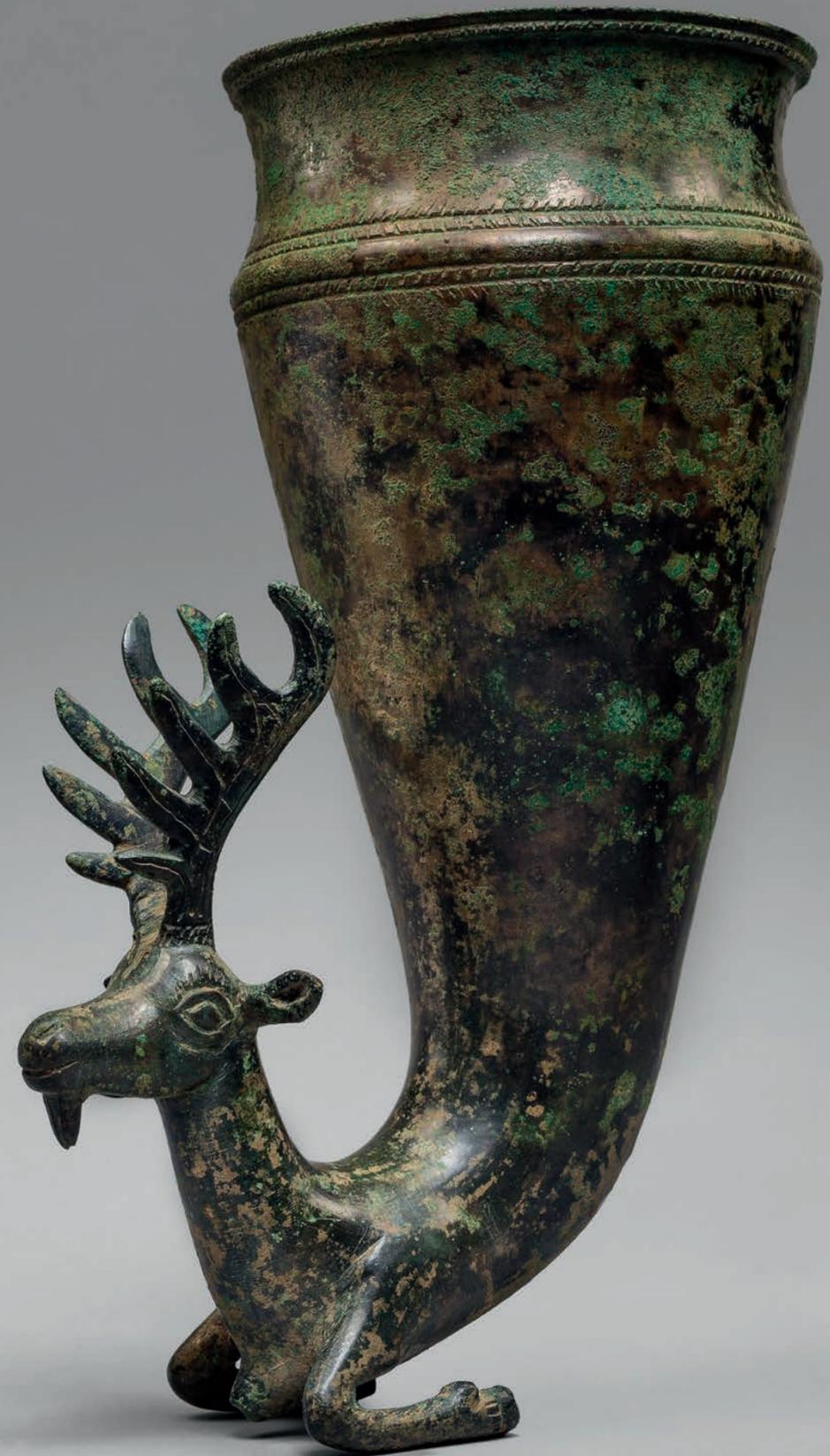
PROVENANCE

Private US collection, kept in Switzerland,
1960s

Also known as the First Persian Empire, the Achaemenid Empire ruled through vast swathes of western Asia between 550 BC and 330 BC. Founded by Cyrus the Great, the empire spanned from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indus River, encompassing all the civilized states of the ancient Near East, and was the largest the world had ever seen. The later king Darius I expanded the empire further into Northern Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. This new huge empire established a civic service, official language, road system, postal service and constructed the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, one of the ancient seven wonders of the world. Their material culture ranged from monumental structures to fine metal goods and was a hybrid of Median, Asiatic Greek and Assyrian influences, yet maintained a distinctly Persian identity.

This striking Achaemenid rhyton is formed from a large bronze hammered cone that tapers into a protome of a stag (probably a roebuck), cast using the lost-wax technique. The two have been soldered together, although no seams are visible, demonstrating the skill of the maker. Designed to stand upright on a flat surface, the animal's front legs neatly fold under its torso, which slenderly extends up into the majestic horned head. Its features exhibit a remarkable level of detail, with large almond-shaped eyes each containing lashes marked out on the upper lids, a prominent mouth with incised lip lines and characteristic furling bronze beard. Grand antlers rise up over half the height of the entire piece, symbolizing the animal's strength and dominance, whilst simultaneously exhibiting the expert skill of the craftsmen and reflecting the wealth and power of the rhyton's owner.

The main body of the chalice is broad and conical, tapering into a slim neck that connects with the rear of the stag's shoulders, leading up to a slightly flared mouth with a bevelled edge. The bronze has a beautiful patina, that gradually flows from light to dark and textured to





NOTES

- 1 I.E. Rubin, *The Guennol Collection*, Vol.1, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991, p.107.
- 2 R.B. Koehl, 'Aegean Bronze Age Rhyta', in *Prehistory Monographs*, Vol.19, INSTAP Academic Press, 2006, p.259.
- 3 Image reproduced in: A.J. Kossolapov & B.I. Marshak, *Murals along the Silk Road*, Formica, 1999, pl.6.

smooth down the vessel, enhancing the appearance of the animal's coat. The modelling of the magnificent rack of horns, with several branches reaching from a main trunk, are reminiscent of those of a stag, while the facial features appear more like those of a goat (both animals were found throughout the Caucasus at the time). It has been argued that a hybrid animal motif was used on purpose for rhyta as a stylistic and schematic interpretation of natural forms occurring in Persian art during the sixth century BC.¹ An animal of particularly similar form can be seen in a well-known late fourth-century BC hunting-scene mosaic from Pella in Macedonia, with thick horns, pointed ears and long front legs.

Little is known of the original use of such rhyta. Liquid would be poured in through the large spout or filled through submersion in a larger vessel, then to be poured through a small round spout in the front of the stag's chest as a libation of liquid offering. Many rhyta have been found in wood, ceramic and bronze, often in anthropomorphic horned animal shapes including bulls, rams, antelopes and stags. Often the bronze conical and zoomorphic examples were created in such a shape that they would need to be held, but this example can stand upright, suggesting it could have had a ceremonial purpose and was on display when not in use. Rhyta have been found throughout Persia, where they were called *takuk*, and have existed in various forms since the second millennium BC. Archaeological evidence has suggested they were used for the pouring of wine and beer during festivities (also acting as a strainer for large inclusions), oil during religious activities and blood during ceremonial rites perhaps associated with the animal depicted.² An eighth-century AD mural on the walls of Panjakent Palace in modern-day Uzbekistan shows several libation scenes that feature stag and antelope rhyta, including one that is formed of the head and neck of a beast, and one that appears to be in the shape of ours, with front head and haunches tapering into a cone – testament to the popularity of these objects, which outlasted the Achaemenid Empire.³ In these scenes, airborne streams of wine pour from the rhyta in the hands of servants towards the mouths of the congregation, suggesting how they would have originally been operated. According to Herodotus, the Persians were 'very fond of wine' and it was drunk extensively throughout the sixth and fifth centuries BC across the Achaemenid Empire, suggesting perhaps that this was a wine-funnelling vessel. The funnelling action would limit how much wine could be consumed from the predetermined amount held by the cone. The carrier would hold a thumb over the hole when it was in use to stem the flow of the contents – probably the role of a servant.



1 Stag rhyton, Asia Minor, 4th century BC, bronze, h. 37 cm, Miho Museum, Kyoto, BACo21

Surviving in excellent condition, this rhyton would have no doubt once graced the table of an important Achaemenid citizen during festivities and rituals, hinting at their wealth and power as it was processed around the room.

A similar zoomorphic stag rhyton can be found in the Miho Museum collection in Japan, exhibiting the same hammered bronze cone (although lacking the detailed rim of this example) and cast stag protome (1). The two are particularly alike, although ours exhibits a more stylized and characterful representation with a finer understanding of detail, symmetry and harmonious curves. Unlike the present example, the Miho rhyton is not able to stand on a flat surface and would contain less liquid – perhaps designed for a lesser conspicuous display of the owner's wealth. The Miho Museum example is from the fourth century BC, a period in which Achaemenid art was increasingly being copied throughout the Hellenistic world, as it was exported back to Athens after the Persians' defeat in the Greco-Persian wars, providing great inspiration to Athenian craftsmen. As the power of the Achaemenid Empire began to crumble, their artistic output became less voracious and less skilled. However, the influence of their creativity was felt for many centuries after throughout central Asia and the Mediterranean. The fine example presented here tells the story of this strong lineage of Achaemenid influence and is arguably worthy of any great museum collection.



25

GOLD ACHAEMENID DUCK BRACELET WITH CORNELIAN AND LAPIS LAZULI

IRAN, 6TH–5TH CENTURY BC
HEIGHT 9.5 CM, WIDTH 9 CM

PROVENANCE

F.S. collection, 1960s

NOTES

- 1 O.W. Muscarella, *Archaeology, Artifacts and Antiquities of the Ancient Near East: Sites, Cultures and Provinces*, Leiden, Brill, 2013, p.656.
- 2 E.R.M. Dussinberre, *Aspects of Empire in Achaemenid Sardis*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.279.



1 Achaemenid duck-headed bracelet, 6th–4th century BC, gold, h. 8.3 cm, Shumei collection, Miho Museum, Kyoto

The Achaemenid Empire produced some of the most exquisite jewellery of the ancient world, and this fine zoomorphic bracelet exemplifies the skill and innovation of its craftsmen. Depicting two ducks with their heads facing outwards in typical Achaemenid style, with a gold tube-like structure for the band, it would have adorned the wrist of a fashionable, wealthy woman some 2,500 years ago. These were highly coveted objects and were widely traded.¹ Achaemenid jewellery was considered so fine that many people chose to be buried wearing their best examples.²

This bracelet has been inlaid with the semi-precious stones carnelian and lapis lazuli, set into the ducks' breasts. Both stones were much sought-after in the ancient world, their deep, rich, alluring colours making them highly prized and reserved for only the finest adornment.

This bracelet type can also be seen in much simpler versions, of gold or bronze wire, with turned heads of varying beasts. Ducks are among the scarcest of animals found on Achaemenid bracelets and torques, making this an exceptionally rare piece. There are three examples of duck-head bracelets in the Shumei collection in the Miho Museum in Kyoto, all of which are of similarly sturdy thickness, unlike traditional Achaemenid jewellery, which tends to be thin and slender.

It is possible that, like the finest example in the Shumei collection (1), the ducks on this piece were originally joined at the breast with pins and could be disconnected from the main body of the bracelet, allowing it to be easily placed on one's wrist. The Shumei piece contains many small inlays of stone (most now missing), whereas the maker of ours has opted for fewer, but larger stones. Unlike the Shumei example, the body of this bracelet is also decorated with a concentric pattern, adding to the zoomorphic quality with feather-like patterns. Delicately detailed and of particularly unusual shape and subject, this charming bracelet would have no doubt been just as eye-catching and coveted when it was made as it remains today.



PAIR OF DOUBLE-FACED ACHAEMENID EARRINGS

IRAN, 5TH CENTURY BC

GOLD WITH INLAID SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES, DIAMETER 3.3 CM



PROVANCE

Private Swiss collection, acquired 1970–75

NOTES

- 1 For an overview of Achaemenid earrings see J. Curtis et al., *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia*, London, British Museum Press, 2005, pp.144–45, figs.173–79, and R. Grisham, *Persia: From the Origins to Alexander the Great*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1964, figs.323–23.
- 2 C. Fabrègues, 'Gandharan Earrings of Achaemenid Derivation', *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology*, vol. 1, 2006, p.74.
- 3 Curtis et al. 2005, p.134.
- 4 M.C. Miller, *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century BC: A Study in Cultural Receptivity*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.57.
- 5 A. Ivantchik, V. Licheli, *Achaemenid Culture and Local traditions in Anatolia, Southern Caucasus and Iran: New Discoveries*, Leiden, Brill, 2007, p.111.
- 6 E.R.M. Dusinberre, *Empire, Authority, and Autonomy in Achaemenid Anatolia*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p.153.
- 7 P. Oliver Harper, J. Aruz, *The Royal City of Susa: Ancient Near Eastern Treasures in the Louvre*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, p.250, fig.178.

The Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC), also known as the First Persian Empire, was founded by Cyrus the Great, who brought previously unseen prosperity and wealth to his citizens, establishing what was at the time the largest empire the world had ever seen. A unified civilian code, road network, postal service, legal framework and official language helped establish a sense of collectiveness that in turn created a new style of central Asian art. Greatly inspired by Median, Assyrian and Greek tastes, but with a distinctively Achaemenid disposition, it is evident across surfaces from monumental sculpture and friezes down to exquisite gold working such as these fine earrings. Its popularity quickly spread, especially in the later years, when the Empire's power began to wane and its luxury goods were exported back to Athens as the spoils of war, where local craftsmen coveted their luxurious materials and intricate techniques.

Achaemenid jewellery is distinguished for its fine quality of inlaid polychrome decoration, with stone, glass and faience, which was sealed into place with red-coloured cinnabar (mercury sulphide, which occurs naturally in Iran) or bitumen.¹ The most popular inclusions were carnelian, lapis lazuli and turquoise, all from nearby Sogdiana, while the gold used was predominantly mined in northern Afghanistan. Each of the materials was highly sought-after and their scarcity afforded them great value in antiquity.



1 One of a pair of Achaemenid earrings, 4th century BC, excavated 1901, gold, lapis lazuli and turquoise, h. 4.1 cm, w. 4.4 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, Sb 2764, 2765



1 Achaemenid earring, 6th–4th century BC, gold and turquoise, diam. 6 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1989.281.33

Modelled in the form of a circle broken by a keyhole-shaped opening, this pair of earrings consist of a gold sheet decorated with multi-coloured inlays surrounding the opening in a shape and style first seen in the 5th century BC that quickly became popular throughout the empire.² The lavish inlays on both sides consist of various shapes, including triangular, circular and of leaf form, while the triangular border surrounding the interior rim is made of deep red, turquoise and dark green precious stones that have been expertly fitted into cavities within the surface of the gold. A small hinged gold pin across the top of these earrings held them in place. Both the interior and exterior border of the earrings is lined with exquisite granulation work, leaving no surface undecorated. Worn loosely, they would have shimmered and trembled at the slightest movement, no doubt dazzling every onlooker. According to the Greek author Arrian, even Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, was himself buried with 'earrings of stones set in gold' (presumably similar gold earrings with polychrome inlay to these) in his tomb at Pasargadae.³

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus, who lived during the 5th century BC noted how concubines, when joining Persian generals on their military campaigns, were lavishly adorned in fine gold and precious stone jewellery.⁴ Smaller pieces such as this would have been ideal as travelling accessories, displaying the wealth and social status of the wearer, and in turn their male partner. Excavated burials of important Achaemenid women in Pichvni and Vani in western Georgia have uncovered an array of fine gold grave goods, including beautiful earrings, worn by the deceased when interred, demonstrating their importance to the owner as a material possession worthy of being worn for eternity.⁵ Wall reliefs at Persepolis on the glazed brick panels depict similar style earrings being worn by both Persians and Medians, suggesting they were part of courtly apparel worn by the noblest members of society, and ancient Egyptian wall murals and statues also depict figures wearing Achaemenid jewellery, testament to its popularity and courtly associations beyond the empire's borders.⁶

A similar pair of Achaemenid earrings can be found in the Louvre in Paris (1). Consisting of wide flat rings with key-hole openings, they are decorated with cloisonné on both sides in the same manner as ours. The Louvre earrings contain a more regimented form of decoration, and like ours are missing several of their original inclusions, but display the same exotic taste for lapis lazuli and turquoise, surmounted by bands of gold granules. Several of this style are known to exist in both private and public collections.⁷ Most exist as single earrings, however – missing their pair. The Metropolitan Museum in New York has a single Achaemenid earring similar to ours, for example (1). The beautiful earrings presented here are notable for being a pair, and are among a very few to remain in private hands. They would make a substantial addition to any great collection.



HIGHLY IMPORTANT ZIWIYE GOLD FRAGMENT

NORTHWESTERN IRAN, CIRCA 7TH CENTURY BC
 HEIGHT 9.5 CM, WIDTH 9.5 CM

PROVENANCE

Acquired on New York art market in 2007
 Private Japanese collection
 On loan to the Jerusalem Museum, early 1960s

This exceptional fragment of gold sheet comes from what remains of a highly decorative embossed belt. This particular section is the largest currently known to be kept in private hands. Several other fragments from the belt can be found in major institutions around the world, including the British Museum, the Iran National Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

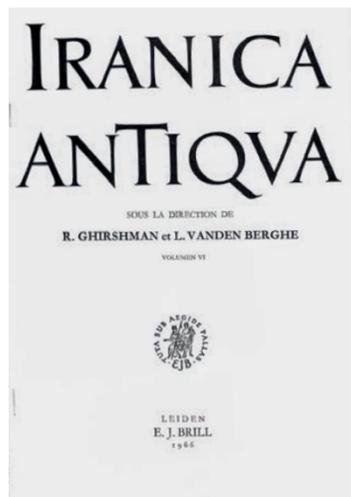
The fragment comes from the famed Ziwiyeh hoard, found in 1947 reputedly by two young boys in Northwestern Iran near the border between Kurdistan and Azerbaijan. Many silver, bronze, ivory, stone and pottery objects were discovered below the ruins of a wall on the south shore of Lake Urmia near the village of Ziwiyeh. However, most famous are the gold fragments, including pectoral plaques, furniture embellishments, jewellery and embossed belts found at the site.



1 Fragments from the British Museum, Iran National Museum and Metropolitan Museum, New York







PUBLISHED

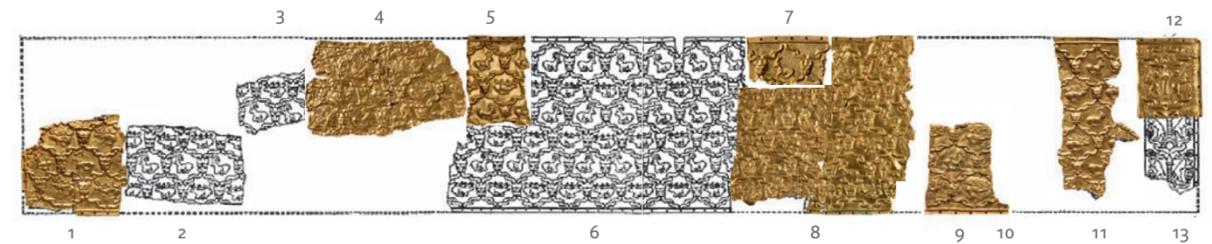
- A. Hejebri Nobari, Z. Kouzegari, S. Mehdi Mousavi, K. Niknami, 'A Chronological Overview of Some Ziwiyé Belts', *Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 3, 2015, p.186
- B. Hrouda, *L'Orient Ancien : Histoire et Civilisations*, Paris, Bordas, 1991, p.421
- P. Amandry, 'A propos du trésor de Ziwiyé', *Iranica Antiqua*, vol. 6, 1966, pls. 1, 2

Encompassing styles and motifs associated with the four pre-eminent cultures of the time – Assyrian, Scythian, proto-Achaemenid and the provincial native style – these treasures have since become a keystone in understanding socio-economic and political-cultural ties along the Silk Route.

The Scythians, a semi-nomadic people from the Eurasian Steppe, who moved out from Southern Russia into the territory between the Don and the Danube and then into Mesopotamia, were responsible for the basis of an animal design found on the elaborate metalwork and jewellery produced in the Central Asian ancient world. It is thought the nomadic nature of the Scythian culture required that their wealth be highly transportable and tradable. The craftsmen, therefore, became unparalleled in their skill in creating desirable high-quality wearable items in precious metals. In nearly every example known of worked Scythian gold, the organic materials used to mount the items – be they leather, fabric or wood – has been lost to degradation over time.

The use of animal imagery in this style appeared in the ninth century BC, typically on pierced plaques made of gold and silver, which depicted deer, lions, tigers and horses – running or fighting, alone or in pairs – embossed with powerful plasticity and free interpretation of the forms. The necklaces, bracelets, pectorals, diadems and earrings making up the Ziwiyé treasure, all characterized by highly expressive animal forms, provide evidence of this Asiatic phase of Scythian gold-working art. The style had a strong influence in western Asia throughout the century and passed, by way of Phoenician trading in the eighth century BC, into the Mediterranean and to Western jewellery.

This gold sheet is decorated by the repeated motif in repoussé design of recumbent ibexes and stags with multiple-branched, curling antlers. The deer are separated by interlacing coils and volutes, which end in faces



KNOWN BELT FRAGMENTS

1. Private collection, currently David Aaron Ltd
2. Davis Museum of Art, St Louis
3. Iran National Museum, Tehran
4. British Museum, London, Acquired from E. Borowski, 1959
5. Private, sold Christie's, London, 25 October 2012
6. Iran National Museum, Tehran
7. Private, sold Binoche et Giquello, 30 May 2012
8. Penn Museum, Pennsylvania Aquired from K. Rabenou, 1953
9. Private, sold Sotheby's, London, 8 December 2015
10. Unknown
11. Metropolitan Museum, New York
12. Penn Museum, Pennsylvania Aquired from K. Rabenou, 1953
13. Unknown

of otherworldly creatures, or lion masks, as they have sometimes been described. The figures on the belt were probably rendered with a cliché or model of the design carved on stone or wood. The details would then have been with a pointed chisel on the front face of the belt. Parallels of the distinctive network pattern on this belt can be found on Urartian belts from Zakim, Karmir-Blur, Ani-Pemza and Altin Tepe and in the so-called Belt of Giymili hoard. Goats and stags with the same iconographical features – the double brow-tine antler stretching over the length of the body, for example, and double outlined shoulder and hind leg – reoccur on sixth-century BC battle axes found in the South Caucasus.

This plaque is pierced three times along its left side and three times along the bottom for attachment to the original leather or fabric lining. The complete rectangular belt would have been about 16 cm high; its length is still unknown because of the limited number of known fragments. Whether the belt belonged to a man or woman, or whether it was made for ceremonial use or as armour, also remains obscure.

The fragment presented here is certainly a museum-worthy piece. The Metropolitan fragment of the same belt is clearly prized by the museum and has been exhibited several times over the years – in their *Assyrian and Persian Art* show of 1955–56, for example, and in *Nomadic Art of the Eastern Eurasian Steppes* of 2003.

Given its rarity and importance, this fragment represents a unique and important opportunity for a discerning collector to acquire a major ancient gold artwork that illuminates and celebrates the artistic achievements of the Silk Route.

ACHAEMENID LAPIS LAZULI BOWL

IRAN, 5TH–4TH CENTURY BC
DIAMETER 9.5 CM, LENGTH 12.5 CM

PROVENANCE

Private collection of Mrs. K., Paris, acquired in the 1970s and thence by descent

The Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC) was renowned for its high art. Spanning Western Asia, established trade routes enabled the spread of luxury items like this exceptional lapis lazuli bowl. Such items were often used for royal gift exchange, esteemed for their rarity and skilled working.¹

Lapis Lazuli is a semi-precious stone that has been prized since antiquity for its deep and rich colour, and scarcity. Mined since the seventh century BC in what is now Badakhshan Province in Afghanistan, it was an expensive material that conveyed the owner's wealth and status throughout the Achaemenid Empire and further. The mines were often remote and



NOTES

- 1 'Additions to the Collections, Eighty-Fourth Annual Report of the Trustees for the Year 1953', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 13, no. 1, Summer 1954, p.17.
- 2 J. Curtis, N. Tallis, *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005, p.109.
- 3 Achaemenid fluted bowl, Iran, 6th–5th century BC, gold, diam. 11.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 54.31.

sometimes inaccessible owing to conflict. Evidence for lapis lazuli's trade in ancient history extends from Mehrgarh, a seventh-century Neolithic site near Quetta in Pakistan, through exchange routes across the Indus Valley, to Northern Mesopotamia and the third-century BC Bronze Age site of Shahr-e Sukhteh in Southeast Iran.

This fine bowl rests on a flat base with a circular body and has carved fluted motifs with grooves that complement the natural streaks of colour in the stone. Each of the flutes radiates from the centre of the bowl, towards its lip, leaving a thin band before the top rim protrudes. It is the work of a skilled craftsman who must have been highly versed in the workings of the material. Lapis lazuli was employed throughout the Empire, often combined in jewellery with gemstones and semi-precious stones, such as emeralds, turquoise and carnelian, or mixed into a pigment and used to decorate walls of palaces at sites such as Persepolis and Susa. This piece, however, is exceptional for its size – such a large solid piece of lapis lazuli was extremely hard to come by. Similarly designed bowls exist in bronze, with fluted columns and exposed lips, but surviving examples in lapis lazuli are considerably scarcer. This technique of horizontal fluting was copied by Athenian potters and spread throughout Magna Graecia, suggesting further evidence of trade and influence routes stretching across the Mediterranean.² The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York contains a gold Achaemenid fluted bowl of similar size that has the same decorative flutes furling up the edges of the bowl from its base³ – evidence of the popularity of such a design, and highlighting that the pattern was used for vessels of various materials.



SASANIAN SILVER PLATE WITH HUNTING SCENE

5TH–7TH CENTURY AD
DIAMETER 21 CM

PROVENANCE

Private US collection, kept in Switzerland since the 1960s

The Sasanian dynasty (224–651 BC) was the last Iranian empire before the rise of Islam, and was one of the world's leading powers of this period, alongside the Byzantine Empire. Because of its geographic location, it held a strong cultural influence over its Persian, Euro-Christian, Chinese, African and Indian neighbours, whilst assimilating elements of their culture into its own visual arts. It played a prominent role in the later formation of both European and Asian medieval art, and went on to lay the foundations of Islamic culture. As a creative entity, the place of the Sasanians in world art history cannot be underestimated. This fine and enigmatic plate comes from the later years of Sasanian rule, when Sasanian artistic culture was reaching its peak but its inevitable fall was also foreshadowed.

Made of solid silver, the plate has a shallow rounded form with a low ring foot, and a fine chased exterior line extending the length of the plate below the rim. The interior contains an exquisite shallow relief royal hunting scene. A king, mounted on his majestic horse that rears its front legs, aims his bow at leaping deer and hogs. Bearded, wearing a large crown and a belted tunic, he also carries a quiver at his hip. His horse is dressed in fine cloth, patterned with circles, and wears a leather bridle. The animals have been carefully engraved, exhibiting a clear understanding of their anatomy by the maker. The boar's massive size and power and the deer's lively spring have been wonderfully captured. The bottom of the scene shows a river in which fish swim, the water illustrated with engraved wavy lines. The image has a frantic tension to it, with animals leaping in every direction amid a flurry of arrows, recreating the frenzied atmosphere of a hunt.

There are three types of royal image on Sasanian silver vessels – the king as a bust enclosed in a circular frame, the king hunting, and the king enthroned. The royal hunting scene, however – depicting kings and





NOTES

- 1 P.O. Harper; *The Royal Hunter: The Art of the Sasanian Empire*, New York, The Asia Society, 1978, p.22.
- 2 P.O. Harper, P. Meyers, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period*, vol. 1: *Royal Imagery*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art Press, 1981, p.8.

royal households in glorious attire, following their leisure pursuits, full of vigour and skill – was the most important and widespread, remaining predominant throughout the Sasanian period. Many plates, in gilded silver and gold, show kings hunting boar, stags, rams, lions, deer and ostriches.¹ These royal hunting plates are of paramount interest as a source of information on the role of the monarchy in the Sasanian state, and offer insight into its clothes, weaponry, appearance, hobbies and even diet, and were undoubtedly of great value and much prized in ancient times.²

A similar silver royal hunting scene plate exists in the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg that shows the king astride his horse with arrow poised amid jumping animals. This image adopts the same spatial convention, in which the lack of perspective adds to the scenes' tension. Embossed rather than engraved, and with gold gilt, together these two plates show the range of materials and techniques used in creating this typical Sasanian imagery.



1 Plate with royal hunting scene, Sasanian, silver, State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, S297, no.18

SASANIAN GILT SILVER BOTTLE

5TH–7TH CENTURY AD
HEIGHT 17.5 CM

PROVENANCE

Private collection kept in Switzerland since the 1960s



The Sasanian Empire was the last great civilization of Iran before the rise of Islam, and from 224 to 651 AD was one of the world's great powers alongside the early Byzantine Empire. Regarded as the peak of pre-Islamic Iranian history, the empire greatly influenced later Islamic culture and had a strong impact on Roman, Indian, Chinese and African art, and later European medieval art.

This dazzling and delicate Sasanian gilded silver bottle exemplifies the fine metalworking coming from the workshops in Iran. Globular in form and resting on a round base, with tapered shoulders, concave neck and inscribed rim, its alluring almond shape is beautifully proportioned. The body of the vessel depicts three dancing nude female figures, who move evocatively around the bottle, holding fluttering mantles that stream in the air. Adorned with thick necklaces, elaborate headpieces and long beaded tresses that flow to their hips, they each cut a sensual and rhythmic figure. The imagery, charged with sexual provocation, suggests an adoration of the female form. Dancing ladies like these would serenade guests at courtly festivities. Examples have been found of Sasanian silver bottles that depict Roman-inspired Dionysiac motifs, suggesting that an interest in revelry, wine consumption and sexual pursuits was prevalent in their culture, but also that a harmonious relationship could exist between neighbouring empires that were happy to borrow each others' visual iconography to decorate their wares, and exemplifying a Sasanian taste for the exotic.

Modelled in a repoussé technique, whereby the thin and malleable silver has been hammered from behind and chased on the front to create a low-relief on the surface, the bottle exhibits the expert skill of the artisan who made it, who not only knew the material properties of the metal and how to work it effectively, but employed a creative use of the bottle's shape to accentuate the curves of the female figures, cleverly working the pictorial





NOTES

- 1 R. Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World: The Modes of Artistic Influence*, Leiden, Brill, 1972, p.3.
- 2 P.O. Harper, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period: Royal Imagery*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981, p.19.
- 3 D. von Bothmer, *Glories of the Past: Ancient Art from the Shelby White and Leon Levy Collection*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990, pp.60–62.

space. Silver was a highly prized metal during the Sasanian Empire, often listed near the top of courtly inventories, defined by its weight in bullion.¹ Such costly vases would have once graced the opulent tables of kings or princely rulers as conspicuous displays of power and wealth, enhancing their prestige, and perhaps also formed part of a complex diplomatic gifting economy.

Sasanian glided jars can be found in the collections of the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, the British Museum in London, the Miho Museum in Kyoto, and (two) in the Shelby White and Leon Levy collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. A particularly similar one can be found in the Cleveland Museum of Art (1). Of almost identical size and proportions, it also has a decorated band of nude female gilded-silver dancers, who work their way around the body of the bottle. One of the figures holds fruit and leaves, possibly suggesting a Dionysiac link. This nude female and the other figures on the Cleveland vase wear bangles around their necks, ankles and wrists, and they dance in formation with one foot raised and hips cocked. The two artefacts combined speak of a Sasanian love of festivities, of the nude female body, and of fine, illustrious goods made from precious materials. Exquisite in detail and quality, the similarities between this bottle and those found in public collections highlight this as a museum-quality piece.



1 Anahita vessel, Sasanian, Iran, 4th–5th century AD, silver, cast, raised, repoussé, chased and gilded, h. 18.5 cm, Cleveland Museum of Art, 1962.294

BACTRIAN SILVER CAMEL

3RD MILLENNIUM BC
HEIGHT 8 CM



PROVENANCE

Collection of Namio Egami (above), Japan, 1950s, likely obtained from licensed excavations

NOTE

¹ G. Gertoux, *Abraham and Chedorlaomer: Chronological, Historical and Archaeological Evidence*, Lulu.com, 2015, p.74.



¹ Camel, Bactrian, late 3rd–early 2nd century BC, copper alloy, h. 8.8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 53.117.1

This stunning silver camel is a fine example of Bactrian sculpture, and a rare survival of 5000-year-old craftsmanship. It likely came from a workshop on one of the ancient silk-trading routes, along which camels laden with exotic goods passed through the kingdom of Bactria, an important stop for fresh water. Depicted in a realistic manner, this camel has a calm and natural facial expression, its anatomy is delicate and accurate and there is fine detailing in the ropes and packs.

Similar in design to glazed earthenware figurines found in Tang dynasty tombs, this piece may have been inspired by such a model, carried by a Chinese silk vendor through Bactria. Its small size meant it was portable and tradable, or perhaps it acted as an amulet to protect the carrier on the desert journey. Another theory suggests that such figurines were intended to serve deceased people who had once travelled the silk routes – just as the camel had served the owner in their lifetime, carrying food, water and supplies, so too would it continue to be of service in the afterlife. The importance of the camel as a sacred animal and a beast of burden in Bactrian society is evidenced through the abundance of images of them; excavations have unearthed camel motifs on seals, vases, drinking vessels and stelae and as statues in ceramic, bitumen, copper, silver and gold.¹

A copper alloy parallel exists in the Metropolitan Museum of Art of similar dimensions, but lacking the distinct quality of this piece. It was discovered in the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex, a Bronze Age settlement on the banks of the Oxus River. The similarities speak of the popularity of such camel amulets, all of a similar size but made from various materials for varying budgets.

NOTE ON THE PROVENANCE

This piece was once owned by the famous Japanese archaeologist Namio Egami, born in 1906, who was Professor at the University of Tokyo and led many excavations around Asia in the early twentieth century. He headed the Ancient Orient Museum in Tokyo and was awarded numerous prestigious honours for his contribution to archaeology, history and art.



BRONZE TRIPOD SUPPORT

ROMAN, 1ST CENTURY AD
HEIGHT 68.6 CM

PROVENANCE

With N. Koutoulakis, Paris, 1960s

NOTES

- 1 Coarelli, F. (ed.), *Pompeii*, New York, 2002, p. 319
- 2 Bronze Tripod with ithyphallic satyrs, National Archaeological Museum, Naples, 27874.
- 3 Bronze table leg (trapezophoros) with goat head, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2010.372.



1 Roman Brazier, 1st century BC–1st century AD, bronze. h. 0.71 m, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Paris, BR2576

The trapezophoros legs of this remarkable Roman table are modelled as goats, and each foot of the tripod finishes in a delicate tendon and a cloven hoof. Elegant curves are formed as each leg rises to a forward-thrusting chest, emerging from an acanthus-leaf calyx. The fluted chests of the goats support downturned protomes, their beards joined to their necks. Their shaggy manes and forelocks are sculpted texturally, and above their ears small horns project bars, which would once have supported a basin or a brazier. A bronze central ring adds structural support. The elegant demeanour of the goats and the rotational symmetry of the piece make it visually engaging. The effortless transition from animal chest to leg tricks the eye, and the effect is both unusual and satisfying.

Similar bronze tripods have been excavated at Pompeii, and the location of one in a temple complex may suggest a religious function, perhaps as a brazier, and the symbolic significance of the goat may be sacrificial.² Alternatively, the tripod may have been used in a dining room, with the goats a reference to satyrs and revelry. In the wake of imperial conquest, wealth flooded into Rome in the 1st century AD. Political tensions ran high, and those seeking status lavished money on their villas and on entertaining. Such an elaborate object would have been a clear indication of status and wealth.

A trapezophoros goat-shaped table leg in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, bears interesting comparison to our tripod,³ and a bronze tripod in the Musée du Louvre features zoomorphic creatures with chest and leg joined by an acanthus calyx (1). Less ambitiously realised than ours, it lacks its striking sculptural quality and attention to animal detail.

Many of the great Classical bronzes of this period were melted down, and much of our knowledge concerning their design is gleaned from marble copies. This piece represents a remarkable survival, and a vigorously sculpted, visually compelling example of Classical bronzework.



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THESSALIAN FUNERARY STELE

GREEK, CLASSICAL PERIOD, 450–425 BC
HEIGHT 103.1 CM

PROVENANCE

Private Japanese collection
With a UK dealer in 2006 and kept in Geneva
Private American collection, before 1995

Thessaly, or Aeolia, was the borderland of Mount Olympus, the mountain home of the pantheon of Greek gods. During the Greco-Persian wars of the mid 5th century BC, the area fell in to Persian hands – around the time of the creation of this beautiful grave stele, which probably represents a soldier lost in battle.

Carved in a delicate shallow relief, this fine Thessalian stele shows a youthful male, draped from his shoulders to his knees in a traditional chlamys, worn by military men under their cuirass and seen on Greek military statues dating from 500 to 300 BC. Although missing his head and feet, the body exhibits a masterful level of carving, with the thick drapes of fabric caressing the soldier's musculature, emphasizing both the shape of the body and the flow of movement as he steps forward. His striding pose creates a wonderful dynamism. In the figure's right hand is a long cane and in his left hand is a box-like object – possibly signifiers of his elevated rank.

Traditionally these grave markers were commissioned to depict the deceased. Though facial features on such stele are often similar, carved motifs and inscriptions, such as tolls of the person's trades and family names, would elucidate their identity. It is enchanting to think of the families of the deceased gathered around this monument in mourning, some 2,500 years ago.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art contains a similar funeral stele (1). Depicting a young girl in a similar pose with one leg standing forward, she gives an idea of how ours would have looked intact. Carved from a single piece of marble, it lacks the monumental height, fine detail and excellent condition of our stele. This beautiful example of a funeral marker is no doubt worthy of any fine collection.



1 Marble stele of a young girl, Greece, 440–425 BC, Boeotian, Pentellic marble, h. 100.3 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 11.141



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