

## Editorial

Dear readers

These are indeed strange times. In March we were suddenly reminded of how much nature can challenge us with the sudden outbreak of new diseases. Our entire economic system, which is so finely balanced, was profoundly shaken by the abrupt halt caused by the lockdown. We had just completed the painstaking preparations for TEFAF Maastricht and were on our way to Holland when it became clear how threatening the situation in Europe had become. During the build-up of the fair, the organizers of TEFAF had several daily on-site consultations with the Dutch health authorities. It was unclear whether the fair would open at all, so we made short films during the build-up to document our booth. These films were uploaded on our YouTube channel on the day of the private preview so that we could welcome you to the fair without you having to travel to Maastricht. The numerous positive responses that we received encouraged us to continue sending you short videos from the gallery in Basel after the fair had shut its doors.

### Visit our YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCm2LVUp9a0QvEqPwfPGqL9A?>

I was glad that TEFAF Maastricht took place, but I was also not unhappy that the fair closed four days early, not least because shortly afterwards it became clear to me from my own experience how severe the disease caused by the coronavirus can be. Fortunately, I was the only one in my company to fall ill. On the whole, Switzerland



Screenshot from the video "David, Ulrike, and Lily discuss an important Late Roman bronze Chlamydatum"

and its neighbouring countries have managed to contain the spread of the disease, albeit at an enormous cost. It goes without saying that the art market, too, has experienced drastic changes. In the context of the current economic crisis, we have reduced gallery operations and you will find that this edition of *Cahn's Quarterly* has been shortened somewhat.

Nevertheless, the art trade is by no means dead, inexistent or in a state of hibernation. Although, for the time being, art fairs have been cancelled, they are most definitely not a model of the past. It remains important that collectors and dealers can meet to exchange information and ideas about the objects offered for sale. Therefore, we plan to resume our participation in art fairs once unhindered travel is possible again. In the meantime, we shall endeavour to reach out

to you in other, innovative ways. As already mentioned, our mail messages and videos have been positively welcomed. If you have not received them, please let us know your email address. We have also expanded our offering with online auctions of inexpensive objects (further information in the box below). Thus you can participate in the auctions from the comfort of your home. If you have any questions, you can of course contact us by email.

We wish you all the best and good health in these extraordinary times and look forward to welcoming you again personally very soon.

*Jean-David Cahn*

## Our Online Auctions with Ancient Art

As of this summer we will stage an online auction every one or two months using the platform LiveAuctioneers. Two weeks prior to the auction you will receive a link by e-mail which will enable you to view the catalogue and to place written bids. Furthermore, you will also be able to bid live online during the auction itself.

Exclusively for you, we are also offering digital private previews via Zoom or WhatsApp. Please do not hesitate to contact us to schedule such an online meeting or if you have any other questions: [auctions@cahn.ch](mailto:auctions@cahn.ch)

**live**auctioneers

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## A Wisent's Head from the Seine

This contribution by the art collector and law professor, Horst Hammen, inaugurates a new column in *Cahn's Quarterly* in which collectors are invited to voice their opinions. As each field of knowledge has its own methodology, it is exciting and refreshing to hear people who are not archaeologists explore the art of Antiquity and illuminate it from a different perspective that may even be highly personal and subjective.

By Horst Hammen



A PREHISTORIC HEAD OF AN ANIMAL. H. 8 cm. Coarse-grained stone. Upper Palaeolithic Period, ca. 40,000-12,000 B.P. Sold

An inscription in black ink on the back of the animal's head records the place and circumstances under which it was found, namely during dredging activities in the Seine near Rouen: "Draguage Seine Aval de Rouen". The Grotte de Gouy with chalk carvings from the Magdalenian is located nearby. The find-spot in the Seine fits well with the fact that the stone object is covered with a thick layer of sinter. As far as is discernible, despite the sintering, the stone bears no tool marks other than a few straight, incised lines and two indentations on the sides. It follows that the shape of the stone, which may already have resembled an animal's head in its natural state, was not the result of a sculptural process – unlike the ivory sculptures found in the Swabian Jura which were carved out of the raw material. Since the object has no edges, but is rounded on all sides, it appears to have been shaped by the forces inherent in flowing water. Because fluvially shaped stones usually do not occur in high places, it

seems likely that the artist picked up his raw material in the vicinity of a river. The incised lines and the two concavities undoubtedly represent an animal's face. The lines can be interpreted as the mouth, nose and forehead, whilst the small hollows on either side – one of which is better preserved than the other – could represent the eyes.

The most obvious question is which animal species might be depicted. Although the object is to a certain degree reminiscent of a baboon, it can be precluded that the stone represented a monkey or an ape. To be sure, only recently the teeth of a previously unknown species of ape were found in Worms. However, those teeth belonged to apes that lived in Europe millions of years ago. In the Early Palaeolithic, however, there were no longer any monkeys or apes in Europe that could have served as a source of inspiration for the person who made this object. Bears and lions can also be ruled out as models

for our Stone Age artist. Bears – see for example the much later Roman head of a bear in Catalogue 23 by Jean-David Cahn, *Animals and Hybrids*, Basel 2018, no. 50 – have a more prominent snout, and lions, as the ivory figures from the Swabian Jura show, are depicted with flatter heads. Furthermore, the eyes of bears and lions are not located on the sides of the head, as is the case with the object in question here; rather, they are positioned semi-frontally. The high, domed shape of the head and the laterally located eyes most closely resemble those of a wisent (European bison).

If the Venus of Berekhat Ram, Golan, (before 233,000 B.P.) in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem and perhaps the even older Venus of Tan-Tan, Morocco, turn out not to be first sculptures to be made by human hands, the earliest figural sculptures – initially mostly of animals – would appear to have been created at the beginning of the Aurignacian Period (ca. 43,000-32,000 B.P.). It is difficult to assign our sculpture of an animal's head to this culture or to the Gravettian or Magdalenian which followed it, as a dated excavation horizon is missing. One of the rare objects made using a similar technique was found in the overburden from the Vogelherd Cave in the Swabian Jura (Gustav Riek, *Zwei neue diluviale Plastikfunde vom Vogelherd (Württemberg)*, in: *Germania* 32, 1954, 121 ff.). Here, too, the piece of sandstone selected appears to have been fluvially preformed. In a manner similar to that employed by the maker of our wisent, stone was transformed by short, incised lines and the removal of one flake into the representation of a mammoth. This animal sculpture is assigned to the Aurignacian (H. Floss, *L'art mobilier aurignacien du Jura souabe et sa place dans l'art paléolithique / Die Kleinkunst des Aurignacien auf der Schwäbischen Alb und ihre Stellung in der paläolithischen Kunst*. In: H. Floss and N. Rouquerol (eds.), *Les chemins de l'art aurignacien en Europe / Das Aurignacien und die Anfänge der Kunst in Europa. Colloque international / Internationale Fachtagung, Au-*

rignac 2005. Éditions Musée-forum Aurignac 4, Aurignac, 2007, pp. 295-316).

Assuming it is plausible that the mammoth from the Vogelherd Cave, and therefore possibly also the similarly crafted wisent from the Seine, were made in the Aurignacian, these two objects could provide an insight into the genesis of artistic inspiration in the first phase of that culture. Following on from this, these artefacts could represent a preliminary stage – albeit not necessarily with respect to chronology – leading up to those completely independent artistic creations which were engendered solely by the human imagination, as is, for instance, the case with the ivory sculptures from the Swabian Jura, whose shapes are not dictated in any way by that of the raw material out of which they were carved. Sculptures formed by human hands were still unknown in the Mousterian (ca. 120,000–40,000 B.P.). At the beginning of the Aurignacian, something must have given people the inspiration to create miniaturized images of their environment. Perhaps this inspiration was triggered by nature itself, for example by a randomly discovered stone. The creators of the mammoth and the wisent may have noticed the similarity between the shape of the stone and that of the animal in question, and thus have hit on the idea of reinforcing this likeness by adding just a few grooves and indentations.

After human beings had, in this manner, discovered artistic creation and made it their own, the ivory carvers of the Swabian Jura, the cave painters of Lascaux and Altamira, and indeed all artists down to the present day no longer needed material pre-shaped by nature to kindle their creativity.



Prof. Dr. Horst Hammen holds the Chair of Civil and Commercial Law at the Justus Liebig University, Gießen. His main area of research is Stock Market and Capital Market Law. Furthermore, he publishes articles on legal history and other historical themes. Currently, he is involved in a project to publish all Sanskrit inscriptions found in North Korea.

## My Choice

# A Cycladic Head

By Jean-David Cahn

The idols that were made on the Cycladic Islands in ancient times are especially fascinating for us today because of the perfection with which their forms are pared down to the essentials. The idols mostly represent reclining women, and more rarely men, children or musicians. Because of their formal properties, they are assigned to certain types, but nonetheless the scope for variation within a given type is enormous. There are also differences in terms of craftsmanship and artistic quality.

Of course, our appreciation of these works of art reflects the visual experiences made by us today, and I would like to present to you an extraordinarily balanced head from a large idol that I find particularly satisfying to behold. It was sculpted in the period that we term Early Cycladic II (ca. 2600-2500 B.C.) and most likely belonged to an idol of the Spedos Type from Naxos. No matter from which angle you look at the head, it is equally

interesting and harmonious, something that is not always the case. The silhouette of the face gently swells out at either side, the top of the head slopes back and the chin is softly rounded. What I find most refined is that the small nose, which is little more than hinted at, is very slightly slanted to one side, thereby creating a subtle tension in the face. The corroded surface of the coarse-grained, Cycladic marble has taken on a beautiful brown colour due to the many millennia that the object lay buried in the ground.

The head is a real hand-charmer and truly a pleasure to hold. Indeed, by turning it and looking at it from different viewpoints you constantly discover new aspects. I was reminded of a childhood memory of the Swiss sculptor Max Bill (1908-1994), who collected Cycladic idols: Before deciding to buy an object, he always took it from its pedestal and held it horizontally in his hands. Indeed, the convention of mounting Cycladic idols



A HEAD OF AN IDOL. H. 10.2 cm. Marble. Greek, Cyclades, Early Cycladic II, 2600-2500 B.C. CHF 34,000

in an upright position is not congruent with the manner in which they were meant to be viewed in Antiquity: The relaxed manner in which the feet and toes of many figures point downwards clearly indicate that they were represented as lying on their backs. Likewise, the modern practice of illuminating them with a strong light from above is at odds with the flickering light from below that was employed in ancient times. As a result, we behold and experience these sculptures in a completely different manner today. Intact idols are the exception. Most Cycladic idols were ritually broken and buried in votive pits with hundreds of other idol fragments.

This important head was sold by the legendary art dealer Nicolas Koutoulakis (1910-1996) in the 1960s. It belonged to a Belgian private collection in the 1990s and later to a private collection in Connecticut, USA, before being acquired by the previous owner in London in 2012.

Discovered for You

# Peplos, Himation and Chiton

## A Further Foray into the World of Greek Garments

By Gerburg Ludwig



Fig. 1: AN INTAGLIO WITH ATHENA PARTHENOS. H. 1.2 cm. Agate. Roman, 1st cent. A.D. CHF 2,600

“The queen herself went down to the vaulted treasure-chamber wherein were her robes, richly broidered, the handiwork of Sidonian women. Of these Hecabe took one, and bare it as an offering for Athene, the one that was fairest in its broiderings and amplest, and shone like a star.” (Homer, *Iliad* 6.288-295, trans. A.T. Murray). Hekabe, the queen of Troy, supplicates Athena for help against the Achaeans by dedicating her most precious robe to the goddess. By relating this episode, Homer provides us with valuable insight into the significance of garments for the women of Ancient Greece.

The silhouette-like, dancing women in bell-shaped, patterned skirts found on Late Geometric vases (750-700 B.C.) sketch a first picture. Gradually, a variety of garments that were fastened with pins or brooches emerged. Later on, these were supplemented by tailored robes. The earliest was the peplos, a large rectangle of fabric (wool, precious linen) that was folded over horizontally along the upper edge to create an overfold (apotygma) that reached down to the waist. It was wrapped around the body, fastened at the shoulders and belted at the waist. Excess material could be pulled over the girdle to form a kolpos. The peplos was worn together with other items of clothing that were essentially lengths of cloth: the himation, the kredemnon (a cloak made of heavy fabric), the epiblema, a short cloak that was fastened above the chest or the ampechone, a small jacket that



Fig. 2: A FEMALE STATUETTE. H. 21.7 cm. Terracotta. Greek or Western Greek, 4th-2nd cent. B.C. CHF 5,500

was fastened at the shoulders. Married women covered their heads and sometimes also their faces in public, either with the back overfold of the peplos or with the kredemnon. Around 550 B.C. the chiton, which had previously been worn only by men, became popular with women as well. This garment was often made of linen; it could be either wide or narrow, and had openings for the neck and arms. Gathers at the shoulders provided rudimentary sleeves; longer sleeves were sewn on. The length of the chiton varied and it could be worn with or without a belt. The hem formed folds (stolidotos) or a train (syrtos). There was some regional variation with regard to the clothing worn over the chiton. These garments included the peplos, as exemplified by the Peplos Kore from the Athenian Acropolis (530 B.C.), the ependytes, a sleeveless, unbelted, thicker garment, or simply draped scarves. The scarves could also be wrapped around the body, passed below the armpit and pinned together at the shoulder. The Samian korai from the Cheramyes Group (560 B.C.) and some from the Athenian Acropolis (530-500 B.C.) wear a diagonal cloak that crosses the upper body asymmetrically and cascades downwards forming decorative pointed tips.



Fig. 3: A STATUETTE OF APHRODITE. H. 47.3 cm. Marble. Greek, Hellenistic, 3rd-2nd cent. B.C. CHF 22,000

“Large robes symbolized wealth and leisure.” (A. Fendt, *Das Kleid der griechischen Frau*, in: Cat. Munich 2017, 130). The quality, quantity and variety of the dyed, patterned and ornamented fabrics attested to the social status of woman wearing them, as well as that of her father or husband. The upper classes were eager to import fine, orientally influenced garments from Ionia, the Levant and the northern Black Sea. Vase paintings and also the elegantly robed kores of the Acropolis give an impression of the luxurious clothing worn by the aristocracy, a form of conspicuous consumption that Athens’ reformer Solon (575/70 B.C.), according to Plutarch, sought to curb by means of sumptuary laws. The period after the Persian wars (after 480 B.C.) was characterised by greater sobriety, with a return to traditional values, reorganization and the renunciation of extravagant attire. The peplos came in vogue again. It was simpler and could be worn together with a plain cloak that covered just the back. The young woman in the warrior’s farewell on the amphora illustrated in CQ 1/2020 wears her peplos unbelted (p. 4, fig. 1). The inscribed inventories found in sanctuaries such as that of Artemis in Brauron (2nd half 4th cent. B.C.) attest to the broad range of textiles

that were dedicated. The peplos scene from the Parthenon's east frieze (432 B.C.) depicts a dedication on a grand scale: Athena, who is also the goddess of weaving, receives a saffron yellow peplos with mythological scenes that had been woven by selected Athenian girls. The Athena Parthenos dressed in a peplos on an intaglio currently with the Cahn Gallery (fig. 1) is a miniature representation of the famous cult statue by Phidias (ca. 450 B.C.). The Roman master skilfully cut the details into the layered agate: helmet, lance, round shield and Nike with a wreath of victory. The snake embodies the mythical king of Athens, Erechtheus I. The overfold is richly pleated and belted at the waist, and the breasts and free leg are clearly visible below the fabric.

Women's clothing became increasingly splendid right up to the Hellenistic Period. It was supplemented by the peronatrix, a loose outer garment fixed over the shoulders with fibulae. The chiton attained widespread popularity and the manner in which the himation was draped reached new heights of refinement. Women covered their heads with it, slung it across their bodies both diagonally and transversely, and also wrapped their arms in it, as is the case with the statues of the Herculaneum Women (Skulpturensammlung Dresden) or the Tanagra figurines. The terracotta figurine of a young lady offered for sale by the Cahn Gallery (fig. 2) displays her clothing in a similar manner. Her himation covers her head leaving only the eyes, cheeks and lips free. It envelops her body in two layers, partly covering her chiton and creates an elaborate pattern of folds across her chest and abdomen. With her entirely enveloped left hand, she grasps the ends of the fabric. Traces of polychromy hint at the original colour scheme of the garments. The ostensible concealment of the woman's body has an erotic component, as her breasts and the contours of her body are attractively emphasized by the flowing drapery. The erotic allure of garments is even more in evidence in depictions of the goddess Aphrodite: rendered as if made from sheer fabric and sometimes clinging to her body as if wet, the chiton attained a new level of exquisiteness. The himation of the statuette of Aphrodite offered here (fig. 3) has slid from the right hip, forming a loop that covers the pubes and left thigh, the end cascading downwards. The seemingly wet chiton forms fine folds over the abdomen and waist and its pleated folds on the right leg shimmer through the delicate fabric of the himation.

As our foray into the world of Greek clothing has shown, the development of the garments worn by women was deeply influenced by both social and religious factors.

Literature: E. Baumgartner et. al., *DivineXDesign. Das Kleid der Antike*, Cat. Munich 2017. M. Harlow (ed.), *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in Antiquity* (London/New York 2017).

## A Contribution to Research

# Impressions of Ancient Gems

By Jean-David Cahn



Sir John Boardman and Dr. Claudia Wagner open the box with archival materials from the Münzen und Medaillen AG. Oxford, January 2020.

While sorting documents in the gallery archive, I discovered a box that contained thousands of plasticine and plaster impressions of gems as well as the corresponding photographic records. The impressions and photographs document gems that were sold by the Münzen und Medaillen AG. This extremely important body of information was the fruit of decades of meticulous documentation by Rita Perry (1928-2012), who began working for my father in 1967.

In January 2020, I donated this scientifically important collection to the Gems Research Programme of the Classical Art Research Centre (CARC) at Oxford University. The Beazley Archive, which is at the heart of the Classical Art Research Centre is probably best known for its database on ancient Greek vases. However, Sir John Beazley also collected impressions of ancient intaglios – around 25,000 in number – and thus research on gemstones and cameos has always been a key part of the CARC's work. After his retirement in 1994, the highly respected professor of classical art and archaeology, Sir John Boardman, initiated the Gems Research Programme which has been led by Claudia Wagner since 1997. The Gems Programme focuses on research pertaining to historical collections and the influence that

ancient artworks had on 18th and 19th-century connoisseurs and artists, as well as the publication of outstanding gem collections. Furthermore, it has built an online database which makes photographs and impressions of gems, rare publications, and manuscripts available to a wide public. Beazley's collection of impressions has been expanded several times over the decades, making this study collection one of the most comprehensive in the world. It was thus with great pleasure that I was able to further enhance this wonderful resource through the above-mentioned gift.



Impressions of ancient gems from the archive of the Münzen und Medaillen AG.

Beauty and Abstraction in Antiquity

New Artworks Monthly  
on [www.cahn.ch](http://www.cahn.ch)



A BIRD-SHAPED VESSEL. L. 11.4 cm. Reddish-brown clay. Formerly Coll. Prof. Hans Dahn (1919-2019), Lausanne; acquired 7.1.1957 from Spink, London. Egypt, Predynastic, Naqada I, ca. 4500-3500 B.C. CHF 7,600



A COSMETIC PALETTE IN THE SHAPE OF A FISH. L. 12.3 cm. Slate. Formerly Coll. Prof. Hans Dahn (1919-2019), Lausanne; acquired 18.3.1953 (from Coll. Hindamian, Paris). Egypt, Predynastic, Naqada II-III, 2nd half of 4th mill. B.C. CHF 4,600



AN IMPASTO CUP WITH BRONZE DECORATION. H. 12.3 cm. Clay. A frieze of bronze rivets encircles the neck. Formerly priv. coll. K.A., Riehen. Acquired in September 1974. Thence by descent in the family. Villanovan, 8th cent. B.C. CHF 2,400



A KNIFE WITH TANG. L. 23 cm. Bronze. Curved blade with pointed tip. Incised crosses and lines close to the tang. Formerly Collection John Woodman Higgins (1874-1961), founder of the Higgins Armory Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts, acquired from Sumner Healey, New York, 30.4.1929. Thereafter priv. coll. England. Europe, Late Bronze Age, ca. 1300-800 B.C. CHF 1,800



A POSAMENTERIE FIBULA. L. 20.1 cm. Bronze. Type with spiral disk, here composed of 14 loops, attached to the bow. Loop-shaped catch. Lateral pairs of spiral disks (only partially preserved) are attached to the bow by means of cast crossbars. Formerly South German priv. coll., acquired in the 1970s-1980s. Eastern Europe, Late Bronze Age, ca. 1100-900 B.C. CHF 1,400



A DOUBLE SPIRAL FIBULA. W. 17.8 cm. Bronze. Formerly priv. coll. D. G., Portugal, acquired on the German art market, before 1980. Eastern Central or Southeastern Europe, Latest Bronze to Early Iron Age, Urnfield and Hallstatt Period, ca. 9th to 6th cent. B.C. CHF 4,600



A SMALL AMPHORA. H. 7.5 cm. Fired clay. Biconical vessel with tapering neck. Interlace pattern on the shoulder. Formerly Coll. Dr. Siegfried Zimmer, ca. 1950. Silesia (Poland), Lusatian Culture, Bronze to Iron Age, ca. 1300-500 B.C. CHF 4,800



A HAND AXE. H. 12.9 cm. Stone (Silix, Le Grand-Pressigny). Formerly priv. coll. Dalomba, France, prior to 1930. Europe, France, Lower Palaeolithic, ca. 800,000-100,000 B.P. CHF 2,800



A STONE AXE. L. 22.2 cm. Yellow-brown stone (Silix) with beige and brown patches. Formerly priv. coll., Germany, 1990s. Thereafter priv. coll. M. D., Belgium. Denmark, Neolithic, ca. 4000 B.C. CHF 4,800



A DAGGER BLADE. L. 27 cm. Stone (flint). Elongated, lanceolate shape. Important form in the Nordic Late Neolithic. Formerly French private coll., 1970s. Northern Europe, Late Neolithic, ca. 2350-2000 B.C. CHF 8,800



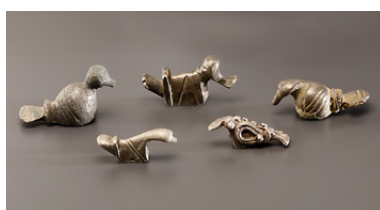
A FEMALE IDOL (PHI TYPE). H. 13 cm. Clay, red-brown glaze. Formerly Coll. Prof. Hans Dahn (1919-2019), Lausanne; acquired 4.8.1954 from Spink, London. Mycenaean, LH III, 14th-13th cent. B.C. CHF 6,000



A POINTED AMPHORISKOS. H. 15.5 cm. Clay. Formerly priv. coll. Prof. Hans A. Dahn, Lausanne (1919-2019), acquired 27.3.1951. Greek, Middle Corinthian, ca. 580 B.C. CHF 6,500



A BLACK-FIGURE EYE-SKYPHOS. H. 7.9 cm. Clay. Formerly priv. coll. E.W., Zurich, acquired in September 1977. Thence by descent in the family. Attic, Greece, ca. 510-500 B.C. CHF 6,800



FIVE BIRD APPLIQUES. L. max. 2.2 cm. Silver. Decorated with applied silver threads and fine incised lines. Formerly German art market, 2008. Late Roman to Byzantine, 4th-7th cent. A.D. CHF 1,800

A CORINTHIAN RING ASKOS WITH PANTHER AND SWANS. H. 13.3 cm. Clay. Formerly priv. coll. K.A., Riehen. Acquired at Auktion Koller 33, Nr. 4167, May 1975). Thence by descent in the family. Greek, Middle Corinthian, ca. 600 B.C. CHF 3,800



A TUTULUS FIBULA. W. 3.3 cm. Gold, bronze, carnelian. The oval brooch is made of sheet gold and adorned with scale-like gold wire mesh surrounding a central carnelian. Formerly priv. coll. Germany, 1970s-1980s. Roman, 4th-5th cent. A.D. CHF 4,600



A BEAKER. H. 6.4 cm. Pale blue glass. Bi-conical wall with flared, rounded lip. Arched base. Small concave base. Formerly priv. coll. Germany 1993. Thereafter priv. coll. R.S. Orlando, Florida, since 1998. Roman, 3rd-4th cent. A.D. CHF 900



A GOLD GLASS BEAD NECKLACE. L. 51.8 cm. Glass, gold, faience. Formerly priv. coll. Maurice Bouvier (1901-1981), who lived in Egypt as of 1929, returning to Switzerland in 1959. Thereafter by descent to his son Jean-Francois Bouvier. Roman, 1st-3rd cent. A.D. CHF 5,600



A PAIR OF GOLD BRACELETS. W. max. 6.2 cm and 6.9 cm. Gold. Formerly priv. coll. Maurice Bouvier (1901-1981), who lived in Egypt as of 1929, returning to Switzerland in 1959. Thereafter by descent to his son Jean-Francois Bouvier. Roman, 1st-2nd cent. A.D. CHF 8,800



A GLOBULAR BOTTLE. H. 12.1 cm. Greenish glass. Formerly coll. Saeed Motamed (1925-2013), acquired between 1953 and the early 1990s. Roman, 3rd-4th cent. A.D. CHF 1,200



AMPHORISKOS. H. 15 cm. Yellowish-green and red glass. Formerly Collection Martin Wunsch, 1980s-1990s, New York. Eastern Mediterranean, 3rd-4th cent. A.D. CHF 4,200



A CUP. H. 10.5 cm. Glass. Formerly coll. Edward and Rosalie Ginsberg, Cleveland, acquired in the late 1960s-1970s. Eastern Mediterranean, 2nd-3rd cent. A.D. CHF 1,600



A PILGRIM FLASK. H. 17.3 cm. Glass. Pronounced rainbow iridescence. Formerly priv. coll. Paris. Roman, Eastern Mediterranean, 2nd-4th cent. A.D. CHF 2,600

## Highlight

# A Festive and Artistic Farewell

By Martin Flashar



A CHILD'S SARCOPHAGUS. L. 92 cm. H. 28.8 cm. D. 27 cm. Marble. Roman, Antonine, mid-2nd cent. A.D.

CHF 45,000

The small dimensions of this box-shaped marble sarcophagus leave us in no doubt that it must have been destined for a small child. Nonetheless, even prior to the analysis of its iconography, a quick glance at the figural relief on the front suffices for us to note with surprise that the scene depicted is filled with joyous and carefree fun and games.

Before delving deeper, however, a brief note on the sarcophagus's provenance: Whoever takes a deeper interest in the collecting history and previous ownership of artworks is well served by this striking piece from the Roman Imperial Period. The sarcophagus was first documented in 1873 as belonging to the sculptor Mellhuish in Lower Tooting, a part of south London. This information is provided by the invaluable reference work, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain* (1882, pp. 472-3) by the archaeologist Adolf Michaelis, whose most significant place of work was the newly founded University of Strasbourg, which he joined in 1872. The piece was subsequently offered for sale on the London and New York art markets. It was acquired by the Brooklyn Museum in 1934, but was disposed of just a few years later, in 1942. After passing through various private collections in the United States, the sarcophagus again found its way onto the London art market in 2014. Thus, this Roman artwork can boast of an almost seamlessly documented provenance for the past 150 years.

The reason why the sarcophagus was made – the burial of a small child – was of course a

sad one and the child's death must have been a traumatic experience for the family. We are not provided with any details, as neither an inscription nor a name were carved into the stone. For all we know, it may have been a serious illness or an accident, or the Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, which remains a problem to this day and usually occurs in the first year of life.

Let us first take a look at the two ends: They are decorated on the exterior by a bow and quiver arranged crosswise and sculpted in low relief. The quiver is opened revealing the arrows inside, thereby symbolising their readiness to be shot. But whom should they hit? The relief of the front provides the explanation: Evidently it is the arrows of love, representing the boundless natural love that parents have for their children, that are meant here, for the main scene depicts a procession of small Amores or Erotes heading to left. Starting on the far right, we see a carriage drawn by a small winged centaur, who at the same time plays a lyre that is somewhat too large for him. As the vehicle picks up speed, the youth reclining in it lovingly pulls another figure towards him. This is the mythological context in which the happy parade advances as if effortlessly. In a second chariot, in the very centre of the relief, a pudgy, child-like Cupid stands upright, to all appearances swaying drunkenly. The figure's central position and the manner in which he is supported by his companions evokes the usual typology employed in representations of the drunken god of wine, and thereby invites his identification with Dionysos, although such an

identification is not obligatory. A little winged figure standing behind the vehicle pushes with all his might to hold him up, and he is further steadied by the attendant figure standing next to him, around whose shoulders he has placed his arm. Four figures in front of the chariot lead the procession on. Foremost is an Eros who enthusiastically clashes the cymbals or beats a tympanon. He is followed by a significantly smaller companion, another winged Cupid and a small Pan with goat's horns who pulls the central chariot.

Thus what is unfurled before us in the face of this tragic family event is the great metaphor of the quest for love. Such iconography is anything but unusual in a sepulchral context. The Roman sarcophagi with Erotes depict scenes such as the vintage, the circus race, the hunt, the weapon smithy – and the "festive" Dionysian train.

The surface of the sarcophagus is corroded, possibly because of the effects of moisture due to prolonged installation outdoors. This reduces the legibility of some details but does not provide an argument against authenticity. The piece is assigned a date of creation in the mid-2nd century A.D., not on the basis of stylistic analysis but as a result of comparisons focussing on the grouping of the figure types used. Two rectangular openings near the lower edge suggest that the sarcophagus served as a fountain or water basin in recent centuries.

Literature: J. Huskinson, *Roman Children's Sarcophagi: Their Decoration and Its Social Significance* (Oxford 1996).