

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
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HIGHLIGHTED WORKS OF ART

2009 SPRING SUMMER AUTUMN WINTER

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS - COLLECTION OF ANTIQUITIES

MEDITERRANEAN ANTIQUITIES FROM THE FERENC HOPP COLLECTION

With this, the twenty-fourth exhibition in the series 'Highlighted Works of Art', the Collection of Antiquities and the Museum of Fine Arts pay homage to an extraordinary patron of art and express their gratitude for an act of generosity, one of the happiest moments in the history of the Museum and the Collection.

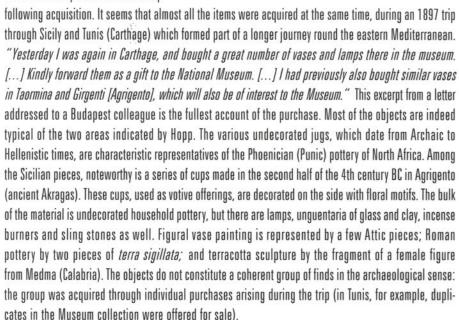
The extraordinary patron of art is Ferenc Hopp (1833—1919). Born into a large German-speaking family in Fulnek, in what is now the eastern Czech Republic, he arrived in Pest at the age of twelve to become an apprentice in the optician's workshop of Stefano Calderoni. In 1851, having just received his apprentice's diploma, he set out on his years of wandering. Ten years later, following further studies in Vienna and New York, he returned to Pest, where he became a partner (and, for a short period of time, also the son-in-law) of his former master. In 1864, he took over the management of the firm (Calderoni and Co.), and within a decade had made it very profitable. While retaining its interest in traditional optical products, he brilliantly recognized the opportunities that lay in new fields like pho-

tography and school equipment. Photography was becoming popular both professionally and as a hobby, generating a considerable demand for cameras and other equipment. Hopp himself was a passionate photographer, and the shop-window of his downtown studio, with its constantly renewed display of celebrity portraits and current events pictures, was a reference point in the social life of Pest. Word had it that "Whoever has his picture in Calderoni's window is either already famous or will be soon". The growing market in school kit was necessitated by the comprehensive educational reforms of the 1868 Education Act, and by the gigantic school-building programmes which took place at the turn of the century.

Midway upon the journey of his life, Ferenc Hopp thus came into a significant fortune, thanks largely to his own efforts. He chose what in the Hungary of those days was a unique way to make use of his huge financial resources: became a traveller and collector of works of art. Between the ages of 49 and 80, he travelled five times around the world. He was acknowledged among his contemporaries as "the most widely travelled Hungarian". On his journeys he was an enthusiastic buyer of art works and souvenirs. He was mainly interested in the cultures of the Far East and Japan, but he found nothing alien. The inscription he himself intended for his tombstone ran: "a friend of all nations". The most beautiful token of his selfless generosity is the remarkable collection of 4,000 pieces of East Asian art that he left to the Hungarian state, along with the luxurious villa (his family home) which houses it. The Ferenc Hopp

Museum of Eastern Asiatic Art on Andrassy Boulevard near Heroes' Square is the oldest public collection of its kind in Central Europe.

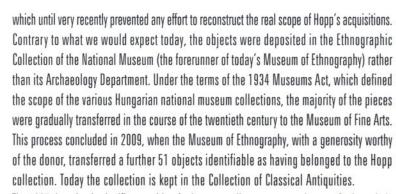
We also owe to Ferenc Hopp the purchase of more than a hundred antiquities. The exact list is hard to compile, as no inventory was ever drawn up





Ferenc Hopp never intended these objects for his own collection. In one of his letters he gave orders to ship the boxes containing the objects straight on to the National Museum without even opening them. Hopp, a lover of Oriental art, was indifferent to Greek and Roman antiquities. Even though the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was one of the high points in the history of the international antiquities market, Hopp on his Italian trips bought himself modern imitations instead of

genuine ancient marbles. The person who bought antiquities in Sicily and Carthage was not the collector but the citizen. While the collector was not interested in ancient art, the citizen could not remain indifferent when the opportunity arose, and seized it in order to enlarge a public collection. What is more, he was working, as the passage above attests, more probably on his own initiative than on the Museum's behalf. He purchased a rich collection of objects — not very costly, but at his own expense — for donation to the Hungarian National Museum. It shows his modesty that he devoted only one sentence to the whole episode in his memoirs (*A Winter Journey Through the Countries Around the Mediterranean Sea*, 1898). The two main motives of donors, a desire for fame and the inspirational force of personal taste, are both absent in his case. These antiquities testify to an uncommonly self-less and modest patron of the arts. It was this very modesty, and the scanty information surviving about the purchase,



The 1897 donation is significant neither for its outstanding monetary value, nor for its artistic quality, nor indeed for the fact that real, unique works of art, if they are to speak to us, must be surrounded by a mass of seemingly more insignificant pieces — the small and silent flotsam of everyday life. The purchase — as János Jankó, head of the Ethnographic Collection at the time, explained in his recommendation "on the subject of ministerial appreciation for the gifts of F. Hopp" (1898) — "deserves special commendation because with it we have established a collection of artefacts presenting the cultural history of peoples who once lived outside the territory of Hungary, and which hitherto had no place in any Hungarian museum...". Hopp was the first to bring the material remains of ancient Sicily and Carthage to Hungary, and his collection has remained the country's largest group of antiquities from these places down to the present day. In an intellectual sense, the purchase was a precedent for today's Collection of Antiquities. Both were called into existence by the same need to present the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world to the people of modern Hungary.

ÁRPÁD MIKLÓS NAGY

