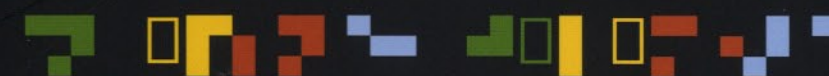




MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
 BUDAPEST, HEROES' SQUARE
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HIGHLIGHTED WORKS OF ART

2011 SPRING SUMMER **AUTUMN** WINTER

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS — COLLECTION OF ANTIQUITIES

CULTURES IN EMBRACE

Graeco-Roman culture — as it is often called in a kind of simplification — is one of the defining traditions of European culture. Besides its many-sided traditions, it has one legacy of fundamental significance: its unique virtue, among ancient cultures so far known, of being open towards the lifestyle, customs, art, science and religion of the politically and linguistically different peoples with whom it was often at war. This openness always made the receivers richer, helping them to find a way to express what they had to say and to make their message more conscious and understand it more deeply. An outstanding witness to this is Etruscan culture, which flourished in the region of Tuscany lying mainly between the Tiber and the Arno, extending to the Po Valley in the north and Campania to the south. Its significance for European culture was widely recognized from the remains recovered after the unification of Italy and in the first decades of the 20th century.

Pottery vases, the relics of ancient ceramics, stand out among the material remains of Antiquity. It's not as if their artistic significance or other values raise them above the remains of marble and bronze

statues, or ancient goldsmiths' work; but the durability of their material, their cheapness, and the innumerable uses to which they could be put, lend them an exceptional importance in the practical considerations of the archaeologist. They were produced in large quantities and have been recovered in great numbers in excavations. For this exhibition, three typical examples of ceramics that attest to the mutual influence of cultures were chosen from the holdings of the Collection of Classical Antiquities.

Controversial ancient and modern theories about the ethnic origins of the Etruscans have long occupied the centre of interest for students of their culture. Learning from the many examples of the separation and separability of ethnicity and culture, attention has recently focused on two questions: at what point in time can we begin to speak of Etruscan culture, and what were the factors fundamental in its formation. Today it seems that the Etruscan territory, inhabited since prehistory, was directly or indirectly influenced by both the regions of the Eastern Alps and the Carpathian Basin. While accommodating these influences, it also continued its own, constantly changing local traditions down to the emergence in the 8th century BC of a regional culture that we can already call Etruscan. In all probability, one of the main reasons for the development of great proto-urban centres in such a short time was the establishment of intensive contact with overseas trading cultures of Greece and Phoenicia. Sailors from both peoples set out

westwards towards the Straits of Gibraltar and beyond, primarily in order to find metals, but also driven by commercial and political reasons and, last but not least, by curiosity for exploration.

The Tuscan Hills, and — above all — the mines of Sardinia, were especially rich in various kinds of metal. Although the seafarers from the East established ports of call at several places on their way, the inhabitants

of the Tuscan coast were strong enough to prevent this. Both groups, however, shared an interest in trading exchanges. As finds attest, products made and traded by the Phoenicians, as well as Greek goods arrived from the beginning of the 8th century in ever greater quantities — mostly through Sardinia — in the region now called Etruria, where new arts and styles of craftsmanship, and the lifestyle aspirations

they transmitted, met with enthusiastic interest. Almost as a rule, the settlement of some of these eastern sailors and merchants on the coast of Italy also played a role in the emergence of the new culture. Intermarriage was common not only between people, but in many arts and crafts as well. From the beginning of the 7th century, Etruscan artefacts bear the telltale marks of Greek influence, while from the second half of the 8th century onwards we find masterpieces of pottery whose shapes can be traced back to the local pre-Etruscan culture, but which were decorated by Greek hands. It is nevertheless evident that while the Phoenician and Greek merchants became richer in raw materials, the Etruscans profited in art. At the same time, this profit was not entirely one-sided. This is demonstrated by Etruscan objects recovered from sites in Greece, especially sanctuaries, and by written sources that also mention certain types of Etruscan objects which had become popular among the Greeks. In a similar way, the Etruscans cared for the adoption and imitation of what they felt could be integrated organically into their culture, or which provided them with a richer expression — albeit at times with alterations — of their own world view.

The role the Phoenicians played during the formation and first flowering of Etruscan culture in the 8th to 6th centuries was primarily that of transmission. They spread the innovations of the great Near Eastern cultures either in their original form or as interpreted by their own master-craftsmen all over the Mediterranean. In exchange for Tuscan and Sardinian metal, they offered luxury items in so far unknown shapes and materials, while their metal relief vessels, made largely in Cypriot workshops, were also in demand among the Etruscan elite. Phoenician pottery was almost exclusively produced for household use, its coarse surface left undecorated, but the characteristic shapes were again imitated in Western settlements. One such example is the jug on display, made in the second half of the 7th century in Carthage, which became an independent empire after the Persians had occupied the Phoenicians' mother country. The Etruscans were on friendly terms of alliance with Carthage, and also imitated their pottery shapes from the second quarter of the 7th century in much higher quality using the imitation-bronze bucchero technique. Bucchero ware was fired to a grey colour and had a shiny black surface. This is the only Etruscan vase type which was in demand in the entire Mediterranean basin, and even competed in trade with Greek export pottery. In all probability the jug on display, which blended the Phoenician model with Greek features, was made in an Etruscan workshop in Campania.

The 7th century is called the Orientalizing period in Mediterranean culture, when Near Eastern cultures played a significant role as models. This is also shown by the animal frieze decoration, inspired by Near Eastern models, of Corinthian Greek pottery, which was widely exported all over the Mediterranean. The shape of the vessel in the exhibition, dubbed a 'globular aryballos' in modern scholarship, evolved in Corinth, and was immensely popular for perfume containers between 625 and 550 (the displayed object was created by the influential Sphinx Painter). As opposed to Phoenician pottery, Corinthian ware was imitated everywhere in Italy, but it was mainly in the Etruscan workshops that different kinds of Corinthianizing vessels were created by the thousands.



Most, as attested by the aryballos on display, perfectly copied the shapes of the Greek originals. The small vessel was made in one of the main workshops of Etrusco-Corinthian pottery, that of the Painter of the Confronted Lions in Vulci, who was named after one of his favourite motifs. No matter how strong the link between Corinthian vases and their Etruscan imitations, the history of the style was defined by the internal relations of the two cultures. The Sphinx Painter created the aryballos around 600, when the shape was already known in Etruria; but it became really popular only 30 to 40 years later, when it became dominant in Etrusco-Corinthian pottery under the obvious influence of new local customs. The shape disappeared in the middle of the 6th century, more or less simultaneously in Corinth and Etruria.

In the second half of the 6th century, the leading role of Corinthian pottery in the western Mediterranean was taken over by the black-figure production of the Athenian workshops. In Etruria, in the third quarter of the century, vases of the Eastern Greeks, who were fleeing west to get away from the expanding Persian empire, were also popular and enthusiastically imitated, but from the middle of the century onwards, it was the masterpieces of Attic workshops that appear in Etruscan sites, and by the period between 525 and 475 Athenian black-figure ware had become by far the most popular there. Some large Attic workshops clearly worked to meet the taste of Etruscan customers — reflected more in the imitation of Etruscan vase shapes than in the choice of decoration. Openness never comes at the expense of local traditions and needs: this is characteristically attested

by the fact that despite the dominant import of Athenian black-figure vases, Etruscan workshops applied black-figure decoration only sparingly and hesitantly. The technique was hardly imitated, and only by second and third rate masters (the only exception being the more or less Atticizing Micali Painter, two of whose works are displayed in the

permanent exhibition). This situation is exemplified by the two black-figure vases on display, both representatives of the Attic jug-type conventionally known as the olpe. The slightly damaged Attic piece with the figure of Heracles capturing the Cretan bull of Minos, belongs to the so-called Leagros Group, which named after vases glorifying a young man popular at the end of the 6th century who later became a successful general. It is the work of the Daybreak Painter, who is named after one of his vases in Athens. The Etruscan olpe with the figures of two dancing youths was made somewhat later between 480–470, and imitates this variant of the vase shape together with the series of motifs decorating the space above the picture field. An example of a vase type that was disappearing, it was produced not in one of the great southern workshops, but in the region of Chiusi and Orvieto, and decorated with inferior draftsmanship. The red-figure decoration long dominant by this time in Athens was taken over in Etruria only much later, at the end of the 5th century. A culture closing within its own traditions will sooner or later stiffen into backwardness, since it stops looking for fresh answers for questions raised by new situations. An open culture goes out to meet everything new, secure in its own self-knowledge and identity, drawing its means of expression freely from past and present. Instead of unproductive imitation, it organically lifts what it imports into its own unique, lasting cultural traditions.

