Classical Greek & Roman Artifacts

Sweet Briar College Art Collection
CLASSICAL GREEK & ROMAN ARTIFACTS
FROM THE SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE ART COLLECTION

The installation displays a selection of items from the small collection of Greek and Roman artifacts held by the College’s Art Collection. Though the exact provenance, or source, for each item is usually unknown, most probably came to the College as gifts from its Classics professors. Some came as gifts from those teachers’ students. Over the years they have been gradually transferred from the Classics Department to the care of the Art Collection to ensure their safekeeping.

In addition to the authentic items shown in the cases, on the walls are prints and plaster casts. These, all of which date from the early 20th century, were made as teaching aids.

The plaster casts replicate portions of the frieze from the Parthenon, a great temple dedicated to Athena, goddess of wisdom, in Athens, Greece. P.P. Caproni and Brother Inc. of Boston, Massachusetts, a firm that specialized in such items, made the casts. Athena, leaning on her staff, is shown in the vertical panel to the far left. The other panels depict a procession of horses and soldiers.

The framed prints are chromolithographs, a relatively inexpensive printmaking method used for commercial purposes at the time. They were designed in Germany and printed in the 1910s. The images of ancient Greek and Roman costumes and architectural elements were distributed by a Chicago, Illinois, firm—A.J. Nystrom and Company—that specialized in maps, charts, globes, and other illustrations for younger schoolchildren.

Kathleen Thomas ’10 and Sarah Strapp ’10 curated this display in the fall semester of 2009. Nancy McDearmon facilitated the installation, assisted by Kate Gorman ’11 and Sandi Prentice ’10.
GREEK

1.
Guttus (Lamp Filler)
c. 4th century BC
ceramic, wheel-thrown
This appears to be a vessel designed for putting oil in lamps. Alternatively, it may be an infant’s feeding bottle. This is typical shape and size for most feeders.
CL.C.018

2.
Footed Bowl
3rd-2nd century BC
ceramic, blackware
The piece, perhaps meant to be used to serve food, is decorated with vines as well as dots and incised circles.
CL.C.023

3.
Skyphos (Drinking Cup with Handles)
c. 7th century BC, Proto-Corinthian
ceramic
Gift of Emily Helen Dutton, professor of Classical Studies and dean of the College emerita
CL.C.034

4.
Pyxis (Lidded Container)
c. 725-640 BC, Proto-Corinthian, probably southern Italy
ceramic, whiteware
This is a container that was often used to hold ladies’ toiletry items.
CL.C.027.a, b

5.
Horse and Rider Figurine
c. 10th-8th century BC
ceramic, Geometric style, white ground
This may have been a child’s toy or could have been left as an offering at a shrine or gravesite.
CL.C.028
6. Aryballos (Small Jug)
6th century BC, Corinthian
The decoration depicts three foot soldiers (hoplites) with round, red shields.
CL.C.030

7. Skyphos (Drinking Cup with Handles)
ca. 7th-6th century BC Proto-Corinthian, Aegina, Greece
This is a miniature version of a drinking cup. Such miniatures would have been used as offerings at sanctuaries and shrines. The scene painted on the body of the cup shows a rabbit chased by three dogs.
CL.C.032

8. Bucchero (Vase or Jug with Handles)
7th century BC, Etruscan
ceramic, blackware
Gift of Kenneth Wright, professor of Classical Studies emeritus
CL.C.026

9. Oinochoe (Small Pitcher)
ca. 8th century BC
ceramic
CL.C.035

10. Alabastron (Perfume Bottle)
ca. 7th century BC, Corinthian
This is a small container for scented oil or other liquids. It is decorated with a pair of geese. These birds were considered an emblem of Hera, wife of Zeus, the most powerful god in the Greek pantheon.
CL.C.036

11. Lekythos (Libation Vessel)
ca. 450 BC, Attic style
ceramic, white ground
The lekythos is a slender, one-handed vessel used for making offerings of wine to the gods. The decoration shows a woman holding a similar piece and pouring liquid from her other hand. Because of its fragile nature, vessels with white ground decoration would have been reserved for special occasions and ceremonies.
CL.C.044
12. Lekythos (Libation Vessel)  
ca. 5th-4th century BC  
ceramic, blackware  
The body of the vessel shows a head of Hermes, messenger of the Greek gods and guide to the Underworld. Notes in the Art Collection archives indicate that this was found during excavations for the subway in Athens.  
Gift of Emily Helen Dutton, professor of Classical Studies and dean of the College emerita  
CL.C.045

13. Stater (Coin)  
ca. 4th century BC, Thebes, Greece  
silver  
CL.N.003

14. Tetradrachm (Coin)  
ca. 4th century BC, Amphipolis, Greece  
silver  
CL.N.013

15. Coin  
ca. 2nd century BC, possibly Egypt  
bronze  
This may be from the reign of Ptolemy VIII.  
CL.N.020
ROMAN

16. Heads of a God and Goddess
c. 3rd-1st century BC, Cosa, Italy
ceramic
These are from small votive figurines used for ceremonial purposes. They were made in molds and would have been attached to a ceramic body.
CL.C.017.1
CL.C.017.2

17. Lamp
2nd-3rd century AD
ceramic
This is a mold-made lamp showing Nike, the allegorical figure of victory. She holds her usual attributes, a wreath of laurel leaves and a palm frond.
Gift of R.V.D. Magoffin
CL.C.022

18. Glass Bottles
c. 1st century BC-1st century AD, Ephesus, Turkey
blown glass
These bottles come from Asia Minor. The iridescent appearance is due to aging. The metal wire on the smallest bottle is not original to the piece.
Gift of Emily Braswell, Class of 1928
CL.G.015.1
CL.G.015.2
CL.G.015.3

19. Stylus
unknown date
ivory
This is a writing implement, similar to a modern-day pen or pencil. It was used to write in wet clay or soft wax on tablets.
CL.M.001
20. Ear Spoon and Nail File
unknown date
iron
This would have been used for personal grooming.
CL.M.004

21. Maritime Carpentry Spike
early 1st century AD
iron
This is a spike used in the construction of one of Emperor Caligula’s lavish barges. Submerged in the volcanic Lake Nemi, south of Rome, for many centuries, the barges were retrieved by dictator Benito Mussolini in the 1930s. He constructed a museum to house them at the lake. As the Nazis retreated from Rome to escape the Allies’ advance in World War II, the retreating German army burned the museum and its barges May 31, 1944. The donor may have taken this spike from that site ca. 1944-1945. Removal of cultural items from their country of origin during wartime is no longer considered acceptable museum practice under international law.
Gift of M.L.L. Stohlman
CL.M.005.1

22. Bell and Bird Figurines
unknown date
bronze
These may have been used to decorate a wooden staff.
CL.M.006.1 and CL.M.006.2

23. Pitcher
style of the 1st century AD, Pompeii
bronze
Gift of Susan McAllister, Class of 1930
CL.M.007

24. Fibula
7th century BC, Etruscan
bronze
This is a large pin or clasp used to secure heavy garments such as a cape or stole.
CL.M.010.a, b, c
25. 
Key and Key Ring
unknown date
bronze
The key was probably for a small box or case. Note that the key ring, a simple spiral of metal, is very similar to rings used today.
CL.M.012.a, b

26. 
Coin
35-38 BC
silver
marked IMP CAESAR
CL.N.028

27. 
Coin
silver
2-1 BC
marked Augustus Caesares
CL.N.031

28. 
Coin
222-235 AD
silver
marked Julia Mamaea
Julia Mamaea, a Syrian of noble birth, was the mother of Emperor Alexander Severus and played a key role in his reign as imperial consort. Both she and her son were assassinated by Roman troops at present-day Mainz, Germany.
CL.N.039

29. 
Head of a Woman
unknown date
marble
This is probably a portrait of an individual and could have been used in the context of a funeral or a memorial shrine. The holes in the top of the head would have originally held ornaments, for example a diadem, for her hairstyle.
CL.R.008

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