A WINDOW ONTO THE PAST

A GUIDE TO THE CLASSICS MUSEUM COLLECTION

ALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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A GUIDE TO THE CLASSICS MUSEUM COLLECTION AT THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

ELIZABETH MINCHIN

FOREWORD

In the early 1980s I was privileged to be able to pursue postgraduate studies in English in the AD Hope Building on the ANU campus. Each day, on the way to my office, I would pass by the public area of the University's Classics Museum Collection. Often I would pause to inspect one of the Greek or Roman antiquities on display and to reflect upon the continuing power of such objects to represent classical life.

For me, the Classics Museum has always been an intellectual and a curatorial gem: a perfect example of the way in which appreciation of the ancient world can continue to engage, to inspire, to educate.

Twenty years later, I am equally privileged to have colleagues such as Elizabeth Minchin, the Curator of the ANU Classics Museum, and Nancy Sever, the Director of the University's Drill Hall Gallery - both of whom have played a pivotal role in the production of this guide. I thank them for this beautiful publication, which is an appropriate tribute to more than four decades of acquisition on behalf of the Museum.

I am delighted that the National Institute of the Humanities at the ANU has been able to support this project in a tangible way. A key element of the Institute's Charter is to 'raise awareness of the central contribution of the Humanities to Australian national life'. There is no doubt that the Classics Museum Collection at the Australian National University does exactly that. Long may it prosper.

ADAM SHOEMAKER
DEAN, FACULTY OF ARTS
CONVENOR, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF THE HUMANITIES
THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

The Classics Museum was founded in 1962 by Professor Richard Johnson, Professor of Classics at the ANU. The collection was established with students and visitors to the ANU in mind. Since that time the Museum has offered Classics students, studying Ancient Greek, Latin or Ancient History, as well as students in the History Program, the Art History Program, and the National Institute of the Arts, the opportunity to study objects which had been handled, used, or enjoyed by the Greeks and Romans of the ancient world. Countless school students have visited the collection, as have many members of the public. Forty years after the collection was founded with the purchase of two antiquities, the Museum is itself one of the small treasures on the ANU campus.

The collection was built up primarily from a fund established and maintained for many years by the Faculty of Arts, but it has been enriched by loans and gifts from a number of well-wishers. In addition, the Museum currently displays a number of pieces on loan from the National Gallery of Australia and the Parliament House Art Collection. In recent years the Friends of Classics Museum have made a number of fine purchases for the collection. Several of these are illustrated in this booklet.

The items shown in the following pages are a small but representative sample of the collection of the Classics Museum. Through this sample we aim to bring to your attention aspects of everyday life in the ancient world, to give you some insight into the cultural practices of this world, especially those which differ from our own, to provide some images of the variety of people who inhabited it, and to describe some of the remarkable techniques which lie behind the production of the items on display. And, of course, we hope that it will encourage you to visit the Museum itself, in the A.D. Hope Building, and to become acquainted with the collection as a whole.

I acknowledge a great debt in the compilation of this guide to Professor Dick Green of Sydney University, who with Professor Beryl Rawson prepared the catalogue of the holdings of the ANU Classics Museum (*Antiquities*, 1981), on which I have drawn at several points. Publication of the guide has been made possible by funding from the National Institute of the Humanities at the ANU. I thank the Convenor of the NIH, Professor Adam Shoemaker, for his commitment to this project.

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STORAGE VESSELS IN THE HOME

In the ancient world liquids were carried or stored in vessels of baked clay, or in skins. Dry goods were stored in pottery vessels. Wood, too, was used in the domestic context - for cups, platters and bowls. Neither wood nor leather from the ancient world has survived into this century in any significant quantity. Our principal reminder of the domestic life of the past is, therefore, the terracotta pot. (On the development of glass in the ancient world, and its uses, see pp. 18-19.)

81.01 *Amphora, Cypro-Geometric I (1050-950 BC). Height 38.7 cms.*

The Cypriot amphora 81.01, like other vessels of similar full-bellied shape, but with a narrow neck, was an ideal vessel for the storage of wine, oil, or, possibly, dry goods. This vessel, dating from the period 1050-950 BC, is a product of the period which immediately follows the end of Bronze Age civilization in the Mediterranean world. In terms of its decoration, the pot is in the so-called geometric style characteristic of pots produced in this period, although this vessel is by no means as heavily decorated as geometric pots may be (with motifs such as checks, diagonals, circles, and semi-circles). Its principal decoration consists of a number of bands of a dark umber below a double wavy line at the belly and further bands at the shoulder and neck.

The presence of the Cypriot amphora in our collection reminds us of the importance of Cyprus in the Mediterranean world, particularly in the Bronze Age. It was Cyprus which provided the region with much of the copper (its name derives from *cyprium aes*, the Latin for 'Cyprus metal') used in the manufacture of bronze.

81.01 *Amphora, Cypro-Geometric I (1050-950 BC). Height 38.7 cms.*

THE SYMPOSIUM

The symposium was an institution of the upper class in Greece. It was an evening drinking-party held in the home, in the men's quarters, in a room which was set aside for social gatherings. The participants, all men-friends of the host, would recline, garlanded, on couches. After making ritual offerings to the gods, they would drink and converse. The wine they drank was, as always in this world, diluted with water. It was mixed in a large vessel and thence dispensed into cups. In the course of a symposium the host and his guests might play word-games, sing drinking-songs, tell stories, or gossip. Often professional entertainers, such as a flute-girl, or dancers, would provide musical entertainment.

81.03 *Fragment of a terracotta statuette of a reclining symposiast. Tarentum c. 520 BC. Height 36 cms.*

The symposiast wears a garland of leaves and fruit. His features are stylized rather than realistic. His protruding lips are shaped into a fleeting half-smile (sometimes referred to as an 'archaic' smile) reminiscent of slightly older work. The statuette is from Tarentum in South Italy, where a number of Greek colonies had been founded from about C8 BC.

65.15 *Attic Black-Figure Lip Cup, c. 540-530 BC. Height 13.9 cms; diameter 21.3 cms.* (For illustration see front cover)

This cup is the kind of cup from which a symposiast might drink. It is an example of so-called black-figure ware: that is, its decorations are painted in a lustrous dark black-brown 'glaze' on the original buff-coloured surface of the clay. Details are incised. The same glaze is used as a wash on other select areas. At the lip of the cup is depicted a ram feeding. Below it is a meaningless inscription of random letters, included, perhaps, for its decorative quality or simply for the pleasure of alphabetic writing (a relatively recent invention in Greece). For other shapes of drinking cup, see the collection in the Classics Museum. Sixth-century cups represent a high point of Athenian pottery.

81.03 *Fragment of a terracotta statuette of a reclining symposiast. Tarentum c. 520 BC. Height 36 cms.*

84.02 *The Johnson Vase. Attic Black-Figure Belly Amphora, c. 540 BC. Height 40.9 cms.*

Large, elaborately worked amphoras like 84.02 may have stood as the centrepiece of the host's table at a symposium. Such an amphora may have been a prestigious gift, to honour a friend or, indeed, a god. The decoration of the Johnson Vase, like that of 65.15 above, is black-figure. In one of the two picture-panels (Side A) is a mythological scene: Herakles, the hero of the twelve labours, fights the Nemean lion. This scene is observed by, perhaps, the goddess Athene on the left and Herakles' charioteer, Iolaos, on the right. On Side B (illustrated here) is a scene taken from the epic tradition, possibly Homer's *Iliad.* Two warriors, wearing helmets, corselets over a short tunic, and greaves, fight over a fallen warrior. One fights to take the armour of the fallen hero as a prize; the other fights to defend him. Two male attendants, wearing long cloaks, watch on either side.

Note the use of white and red-brown glaze in addition to black-brown. The device on the shield on Side B, a tripod (a metallic device used to support cooking vessels over a fire), is white, as are Athene's face and limbs. Her skin, like that of any aristocratic woman, who spends her time indoors, is fair. Red-brown hues are used for contrast in hair and helmets, for example.

On the foot of the vase, on the underside, is a graffito: the Greek letter υ and a second mark, unidentified.

The amphora was purchased in 1984 to commemorate Richard Johnson's term as Professor of Classics at the ANU, 1962-1984.

84.02 *The Johnson Vase. Attic Black-Figure Belly Amphora, c. 540 BC. Height 40.9 cms. Side B*

We have seen on earlier pages examples of black-figure pots, on which the design was painted in black slip onto the pot before firing. The figures appeared in black silhouette against the reddish background of the clay. On the next page are some examples of red-figure ware, a technique introduced about 530 BC. The images on red-figure ware are reserved in the colour of the clay and appear against a background of black slip. Inner lines, showing details, are painted in black slip. To achieve this effect it was necessary to sketch figures in outline on the clay surface with a blunt tool. The figures would then be drawn in outline; any inner details were added; and, finally, the background was painted in black. Only after the decoration was completed would the pot be fired.

Shown opposite are two vessels found in the same tomb in a cemetery of a Greek settlement in Apulia in South Italy. The mug (and possibly the rhyton) is the work of the so-called Menzies Painter, who painted a number of other vessels found in the tomb, which are now on exhibition as a group in the ANU Classics Museum. All are painted in the newer red-figure technique. It is possible to observe the thematic and stylistic consistency of the decoration in this group of vessels.

The Apulian tomb-group was purchased by the ANU on the advice of Professor Dale Trendall, then Master of University House. Professor Trendall, who died late in 1995, was a highly-respected authority on the red-figure vases of Southern Italy.

65.25 *Mug (type N), c. 340-320 BC. Height 9.7 cms; diameter 8.1 cms.*

This mug with splayed lip has a double handle in the form of a Herculean knot. The painted decoration depicts a woman leaning on a pillar looking towards a seated Eros. She holds a flask, perhaps, in her right hand and a chain of flowers in her left. The Eros holds up a wreath in his right hand. There are palmette designs around the handle. A wash covers the inside surface. Similar motifs may be observed on other vessels in this tomb group.

65.34 *Goat's Head Rhyton, c. 340-320. Height 20.5 cms; diameter (lip) 10.6 cms.*

A rhyton is a wine-cup which may take the form of a horn. The ANU Classics Museum contains a number of examples of such cups. The lower part of this finely moulded vessel is in the form of a goat's head. The horns are painted yellow; the eyes are detailed in black and white. At the deep lip of the cup is a depiction of an Amazon in flight, her arms spread. Her axe and her shield, in the form of a winged Gorgon's head, fall to the ground. In the field on either side is a sash.

65.25 *Mug (type N), c. 340-320 BC. Height 9.7 cms; diameter 8.1 cms.*

65.34 *Goat's Head Rhyton, c. 340-320. Height 20.5 cms; diameter (lip) 10.6 cms.*

TERRACOTTA FIGURES

Small terracottas such as 75.20 may have been offered for sale as souvenirs or gifts to visitors to shrines and temples.

75.20 *Terracotta Figurine of a Gladiator, perhaps C1 AD. Roman, posssibly from Asia Minor. Height 16.2 cms.*

The figurine is of orange-buff clay. Note the traces of black paint all over. The gladiator wears a helmet that totally encloses his head. He wears body armour and a greave on his left leg. A short sword is in his right hand. His shield is missing. This heavily-armed type of gladiator is known as the 'Samnite'-type. Representations of gladiators of all kinds were popular in most parts of the Roman Empire: in relief sculpture, mosaics, paintings, even on lamps.

87.04 *Roman jug, early C3 AD. Tunisia. Height 19.3 cms.*

The fabric is buff-coloured clay; the slip is mottled from red-brown to black. The jug is moulded (in two parts, which have been joined) in the form of an old woman seated in a chair. Her age is indicated by the deep lines on her neck and face. Between her knees she clasps a flagon. Her hair is drawn back into a bun and her ears are pierced for earrings. On the underside of the base, in capitals, is the inscription AMO VINV[M] SIC MEDIAM P[ARTEM] VRES SI VERTAS. As this translates freely as "I love wine; so if you turn me up you burn my inside", it is likely that this vessel was used for wine.

The jug was purchased by the Friends of the ANU Classics Museum and presented to the Museum in 1987.

75.20 *Terracotta Figurine of a Gladiator, perhaps C1 AD. Roman, posssibly from Asia Minor. Height 16.2 cms.*

87.04 *Roman jug, early C3 AD. Tunisia. Height 19.3 cms.*

LAMPS AND LIGHTING

The most common source of artificial light in antiquity was the small clay lamp. The body of the lamp was filled with olive oil; a wick was placed in the nozzle. A small lamp gave as much light as a candle. Finds indicate that they were often used in large numbers. Earlier lamps were made on the wheel, but many Roman lamps (that is, lamps produced in the Roman Empire) were either wholly or partly made in moulds.

The Classics Museum holds a number of lamps in its collection. Amongst those of interest to us are those which testify to the spread of Christianity across the Roman world. Note in particular 85.11 (not illustrated), a fifth-century lamp from Tunisia, which features on its central disc the superimposed Greek letters chi (χ) and rho (ρ): the first two letters of Christ's name.

78.08 *Roman Lamp, late first or early second century AD. Length 10.5 cms; diameter 7 cms.*

Of pink-buff clay, this lamp has been dipped in red glaze. The lamp is distinguished by its central disc, on which there is a bust of Africa in relief, with incised detail. The lamp's air-hole is to the left of the disc. The handle is double-grooved. The grooves terminate in two dots at the shoulder of the lamp. On the underside of the lamp is the stamped inscription MNOVIVSTI (of M[arcus] N[ouius] Iustus), indicating that M. Nouius Iustus was the lampmaker.

The earliest images of Africa as a personification are to be found in the Hellenistic period. Her headdress in the form of an elephant head with a trunk and horns is a constant element in such representations. During the Republic this image appeared also on Roman coins.

78.08 *Roman Lamp, late first or early second century AD. Length 10.5 cms; diameter 7 cms.*

A PORTRAIT IN BRONZE

70.04 *Bronze bust of a woman, early first century AD. Height 14.5 cms.*

The head is of a relatively young woman. Her elaborate hairstyle allows the bronze to be dated. This style, with a so-called *nodus*, or knot, above the forehead, rolls at the sides and a carefully constructed bun at the back was popular only for a short period in the late first century BC.

Who is represented here? Possibly we are looking at Livia, the wife of Augustus. Or it may be the head of Octavia, Augustus' sister: the profile is almost identical to that of a cameo portrait, now in Paris, of Octavia.

70.04 *Bronze bust of a woman, early first century AD. Height 14.5 cms.*

GLASS IN THE ROMAN WORLD

The origins of glass-manufacture go back to the second millennium BC in Syria and Egypt, but there was little advance in technique until the invention of glass-blowing, probably in Syria, in the first century BC. Until then production of glassware had been laborious, and limited to small luxury items. But now efficient and cheap mass production was possible and new shapes and larger vessels could be made. Under the Roman Empire glass began to replace pottery for domestic use. Furthermore, the Empire provided ideal conditions for the growth of the glass trade. Remains of foundries have been located in many provinces; it is probable that many of them had been run by Syrian craftsmen. The expression 'Roman glass' refers to glass produced throughout the Roman Empire in the first four centuries AD.

68.01 *Roman Glass Bowl, first century AD. Height 5.1 cms; diameter 17 cms.*

The shallow bowl is of pale greenish glass, a colour characteristic of earlier Roman glass. We should bear in mind that it was not possible to produce a colourless glass until the early second century, when manganese oxide began to be added for this purpose. The dish was made by blowing it into a clay mould which would form a ribbed exterior, and, when the glass had cooled, the lip and interior were ground smooth on a lapidary's wheel. The shape occurs over most of the Western Empire: in Gaul, Germany, Spain, and Italy. There are several examples from Corinth as well as to the east.

68.01 *Roman Glass Bowl, first century AD. Height 5.1 cms; diameter 17 cms.*

77.03 *Roman Glass Flask. Height 19.4 cms; diameter 12.8 cms.*

The flask is thin, light, and finely made. The glass is yellow-green in colour, with some clouding on the surface. The vessel has a rolled rim, a funnel mouth with a crease on one side, and a concave base. The form is characteristic of later Roman work and occurs often in Gaul in the third and fourth centuries AD.

01.01 *Drinking cup, C4-C5 AD. Height 9.3 cms.*

This delicate cup, in moss-green glass, has a short slender stem with a splayed foot and a strengthened rim.

Purchased by the Friends of the ANU Classics Museum and presented to the Museum in 2001.

77.03 *Roman Glass Flask. Height 19.4 cms; diameter 12.8 cms.*

01.01 *Drinking cup, C4-C5 AD. Height 9.3 cms.*

71.04 *Marble Tablet with Latin Inscriptions, C1 or C2 AD (each side). 35 cms x 19 cms.*

On either side of this tablet, which was found in Rome, is an inscription commemorating a death. It was relatively common for tablets to be re-used in this way. Tablets of this kind were used to mark off individual niches in underground burial chambers in Rome. The translation of Side A reads as follows:

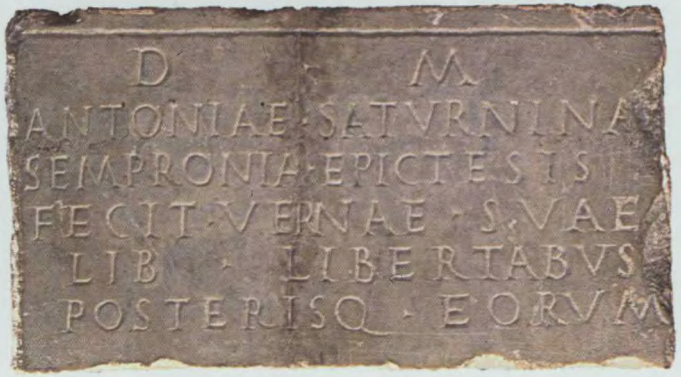
"To the departed spirit of M. Seruilius Gemellus, who lived for nine years, two months and twenty-seven days: set up by his parents Stephanus and Fortunata for their dutiful son and for themselves and for their descendants."

Note that the son has the three names which indicate Roman citizenship (Marcus Seruilius Gemellus) and that his parents each have only one. This may indicate that they are slaves. If the boy's parents are slaves, he has attained citizenship through his former owner's agreeing to transfer him from slave status to that of a free man.

Side A has been published: see *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 6.264049. Side B has not. The tablet had been hung for many years with Side A to the front in Lowther Castle, Scotland. The translation of Side B reads as follows:

"To the departed spirit of Antonina Saturnina: set up by Sempronia Epictesis for the girl raised as a slave in her house since childhood; also for their freedmen and freedwomen and for their descendants."

Antonina was a *uerna*: a slave-girl raised in a household from an early age. Such slaves were often brought up alongside the children of the master of the house. Their position within the household was to a certain extent privileged.



71.04 *Marble Tablet with Latin Inscriptions, C1 or C2 AD (each side). 35 cms x 19 cms.*

79.03 *Roman Marble Cinerary Urn, second half C1 AD. Height 30.5 cms; width 27.4 cms; depth 22.2 cms.*

Urns of this kind are receptacles for the ashes of the dead. The lid of this urn is in the form of a gabled roof. Its pediment is decorated with a circular garland of leaves finishing in scrolls. On either side the gable is flanked by acroteria with half palmettes. The urn is decorated with rosettes and a central panel of inscription which translates as:

"To the departed spirit of Nicephor, who lived two years, eight months, and nineteen days."

As in the case of 71.04 we are reminded that in the ancient world many children did not survive into adulthood. But, even though the death of children was proportionally so much more frequent than today, we observe that parents commemorated their children with every indication that the loss of any child was a source of sorrow.

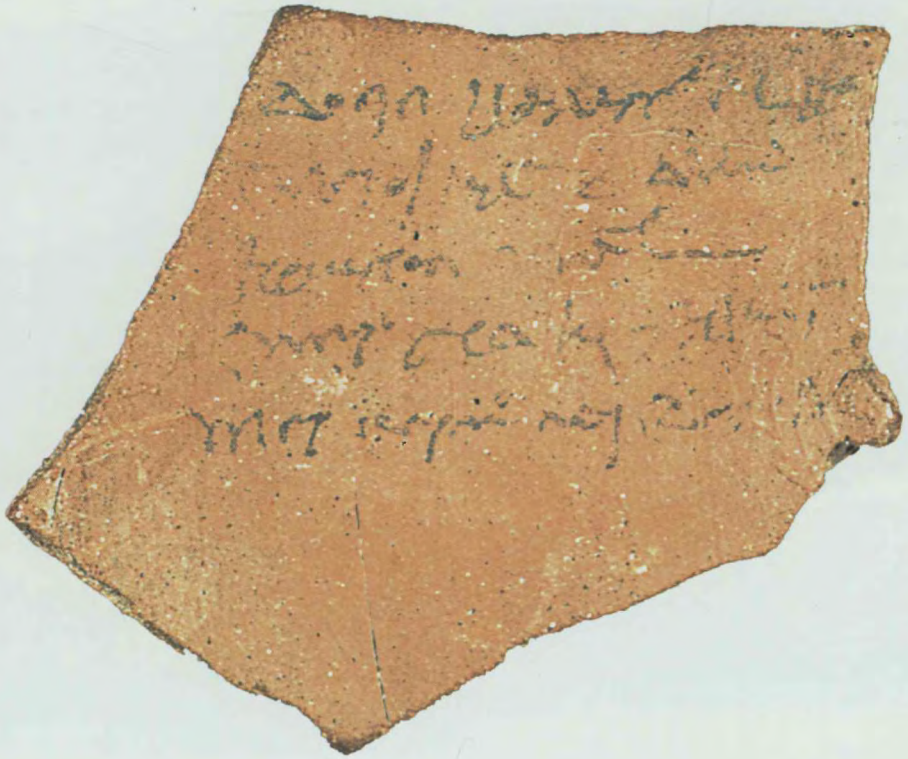
79.03 *Roman Marble Cinerary Urn, second half C1 AD. Height 30.5 cms; width 27.4 cms; depth 22.2 cms.*

EVERYDAY RECORDS

From classical times the Greeks and then the Romans used inscriptions on stone for official purposes (compare the funerary inscriptions above). For day-to-day writing purposes the wax-tablet was used (see the example in the Classics Museum: 73.01). In Athens fragments of pottery (*ostraka*) were used as a cheap, readily available writing surface - notably as voting tablets. In Egypt, after the Greek conquest, potsherds were used for the recording of relatively brief texts: for tax-receipts, lists, magical spells, and religious texts. Papyrus was used first in Egypt, and thereafter was commonly used throughout the Mediterranean world for several centuries, until it was superseded by vellum. Papyrus was prepared as a writing surface from the Egyptian reed *Cyperus papyrus*. Thin slices of the reed were placed in two crosswise layers, one on top of the other; the layers were beaten together and the resulting sheets were polished. The sheets then were glued side by side to form a long scroll. The side with the fibres running horizontally is called the *recto* and was the preferred side for writing. The other side, on which the fibres are vertical, is called the *verso*. Papyrus was scarce, with the result that discarded documents might be recycled and new material could be written on the clean side. Papyrus documents have survived until today because they have been preserved in the dry sands of Egypt.

91.03 *Ostrakon, C2 AD. Thebes (Egypt). 5.7 x 6.7 cms.*

Fragment of pottery inscribed in now faded ink with five lines of Greek. The text is an acknowledgment of the payment of bath-taxes: paid by Dekmos, the son of Heron "for the fifth year for the Northern District". The first payment, made on the 21 Epeiph (15 July), was a payment of four drachmas; the second, made on the following day, was of ten.

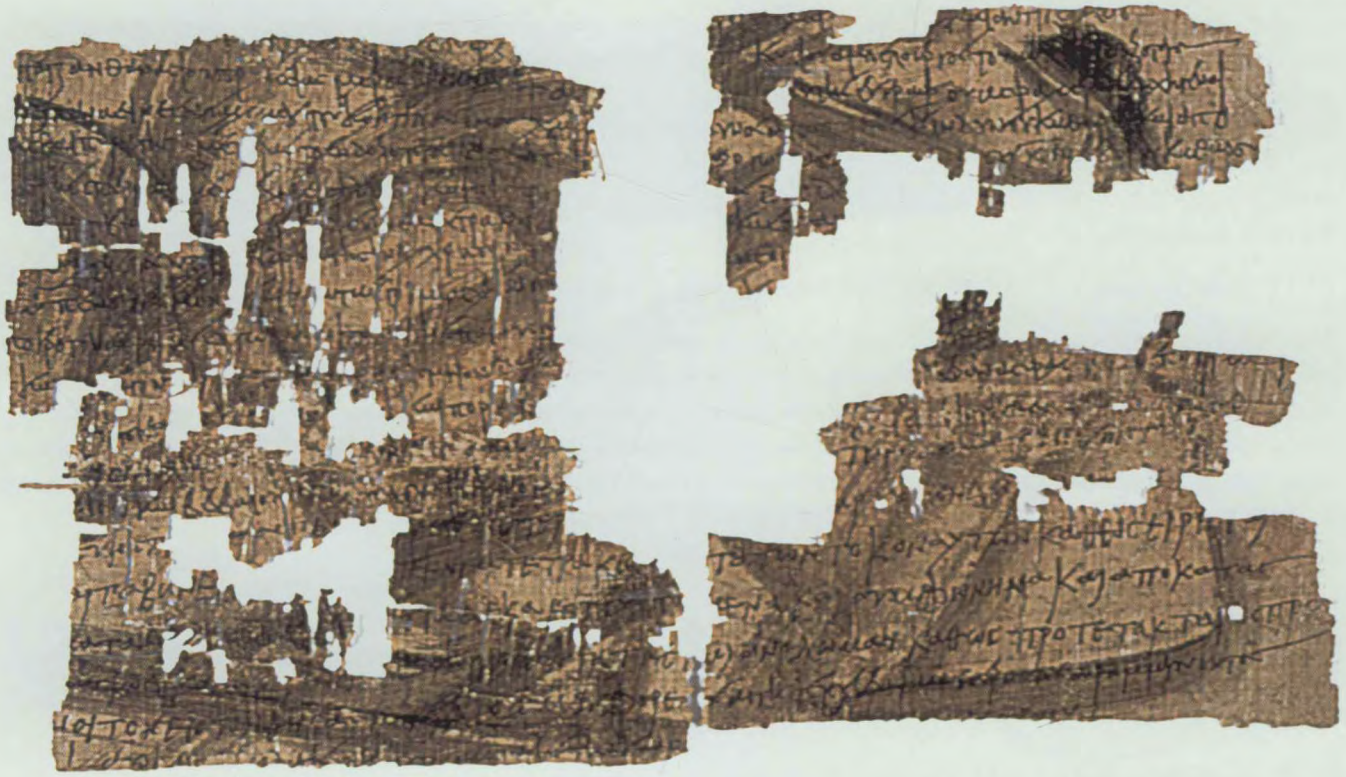


91.03 *Ostrakon, C2 AD. Thebes (Egypt). 5.7 x 6.7 cms.*

75.01 *Fragments of a Papyrus Document, C6 AD (verso illustrated). 15.9 cms x 26.7 cms.*

The single page is in three pieces, with many gaps. On the *recto* is a letter in Coptic; on the *verso* a contract in Greek. The letter, of the period 550-650 AD, seems to be an apology from the elders of the village of Kratos to a Bishop. The letter may be from the archives of the Bishop of Coptos, near Thebes in Upper Egypt.

The contract, probably of the same period, is difficult to decipher because of the ink-strokes with which it was cancelled. It appears to refer to repayment of grain at harvest-time, and a payment of money. It may therefore be a record of a loan of seed corn. The first fifteen lines of the contract set out the names of the parties (lines 1-3) and the details of the transaction. This is perhaps written by a scribe. In lines 16-18 one of the parties has written a brief statement of his part in the contract (equivalent to a signature in today's practice). The last two lines, written in a third hand, attest the consent of another party who could not write.



75.01 *Fragments of a Papyrus Document, C6 AD (verso illustrated). 15.9 cms × 26.7 cms.*

JEWELLERY

In the ancient world wealth acquired in the form of precious metal could be converted into jewellery to wear or silver plate to display and use in the home. The jewellery of the Greeks was technically very fine, distinguished by two techniques: granulation and filigree work. The Hellenistic era introduced inset gems, a fashion which continued to be popular into later times. In Roman times the technical quality of Greek craftsmanship was maintained in necklaces (such as the handsome gold chain in the Classics Museum: 86.02), pendants, bracelets, and brooches. Finger rings were worn by women as signs of engagement and by men as signets.

71.11 *Gold Diadem, c. C3 BC. Height 2.7 cms; length 18.6 cms.*

The diadem consists of a band of very thin sheet gold with rounded ends and a peak in the centre. There are tie-holes at each end. The decoration is repoussé. The main decorative band is a scroll pattern between lines; in the apex is an inverted palmette. Diadems such as this were clearly impractical for everyday use, by virtue of their fragility. They were tied about the heads of the deceased and buried with them as part of their funerary adornment. They have been found in most areas of the Greek world, but appear to have been particularly popular in Northern Greece in the early Hellenistic period.

78.07 *Gold Earrings, possibly C3 AD. Length 1.9 cms; diameter of sphere 0.9 cms.*

Each earring consists of a gold sphere on a circle of gold wire, the ends of which were twisted together to leave a small hoop at the top. The sphere has four indentations arranged regularly around its surface, each decorated with two concentric circles of filigree. The hooks which would have passed through the ears are missing. There is no indication that stones had been inset into the indented circles.

72.05 *Gold Ring, mid C2 AD. The stone: 1 × 0.7 cms.*

The gold ring is set with a cornelian bearing the intaglio head of a young woman in profile. It is likely that the head is a portrait rather than a representation of a goddess or a figure from myth. The style recalls the portraits of the wife of the emperor Antoninus Pius, Faustina (who died in 141 AD).

71.11 *Gold Diadem, c. C3 BC. Height 2.7 cms; length 18.6 cms.*

78.07 *Gold Earrings, possibly C3 AD. Length 1.9 cms; diameter of sphere 0.9 cms.*

72.05 *Gold Ring, mid C2 AD. The stone: 1 × 0.7 cms.*

RELIGIOUS LIFE

77.02 *Bronze Figurine of a Priestess, C3-C1 BC. Height 7.5 cms.*

The figure stands with left leg bent. She holds a dish (for a ritual) in her right hand and a pomegranate in her left. She appears to be wearing a wreath or a headband about her head. Her figure is flattened, her arms are exaggerated, and her face is rendered without detail. This small bronze was probably a votive object (that is, it was acquired so that it might be offered as a dedication to a god) of a type made in quantity in the later Republican period. A number of similar figures have been found in Latium, the area around Rome.

77.02 *Bronze Figurine of a Priestess, C3-C1 BC. Height 7.5 cms.*

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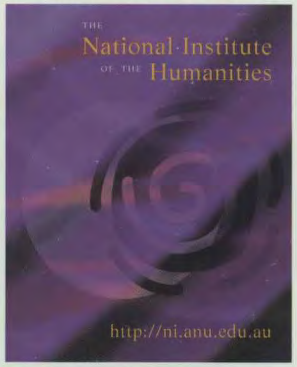

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