Collection Significance Report:  
**Ancient Civilizations: Greco-Roman**  
Simon Eccles, March 2008

**About this Document**  
This document is extracted from a report by Glasgow Museums submitted to the Scottish Executive’s Recognition Committee as part of its recognition scheme for non-national collections.

**Overview**  
The Greco-Roman world is the Classical world in the Mediterranean. It includes the early Greek city states around 2200 BC through to Late Antiquity and the collapse of the Roman Empire in the west around 500 AD. The Greco-Roman world has had an enduring legacy in religion, law, art, architecture, language and politics.

**Collection Size**  
Approximately 650 objects including ceramics and terracottas, oil-lamps, bronze figurines and helmets, marble sculptures, mosaics and glass vessels, and 120 domestic items from Roman Egypt.

**The Collection**  
This collection comprises antiquities from lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea settled by the ancient Greeks and the Romans, dating from the Minoan and Mycenaean Periods to the fall of Rome (2200 BC to fifth century AD).

The most spectacular object is the Warwick Vase, which originally came from Hadrian’s Villa at Tivoli. There are 139 Greek ceramics, terracotta model acting masks and figurines dating to the fourth and early third centuries BC, from excavations on the Aeolian island of Lipari, Italy. A number of purchases and gifts from private collections have included ceramics, metalwork, terracotta figurines, oil lamps, three bronze helmets and a small number of Roman domestic items.

**Collection Significance**  
This is one of the finest collections in Scotland and has been extensively and recently published. Overall it is of national significance, but certain elements are also internationally important.

The collection donated by James Stevenson came from archaeological excavations in 1879 of 20 tombs in the Contrada Diana on the island of Lipari in Italy. These red-figured vases, including work by the Lipari Painter, and terracottas relating to Greek theatre are of great value. It is the only significant group of such material outside the Museo Archeologico Regionale Eoliano, Lipari. Glasgow Museums’ terracotta model acting masks, relating principally to Greek New Comedy (but also to Old Comedy, Tragedy and Satyr plays), are of the highest quality, and in some cases are superior.
to those surviving in Lipari made from the same moulds. The original acting masks were made of perishable materials and have not survived, so these model masks provide invaluable evidence for the lost originals. Two fine late fourth century BC calyx-kraters (wine-mixing bowls) illustrate the link between Greek theatre and the cult of Dionysos, the god of wine. The theatre masks from Lipari have been the subject of a major AHRB funded research project at the University of Glasgow to conduct practice-based research using full-size reconstructions of the masks.

Major objects from the Roman Empire include wooden fragments of a third century pumping wheel from the Spanish copper mines at Tharsis, Huelva, a rare survival of Roman mining technology. There are two second to third century Roman panel portraits painted in encaustic on limewood from Hawara, Egypt, depicting a youth and a bearded man. These are among the best of their kind in the world and are rare survivals of realistic portraiture from the Classical world. A large late-Roman marble grave stone of Mercurios and Sabina from Greece is of the highest quality. Its lengthy Greek inscription gives a moving account of the young couple’s death and their orphaned child.

The collection provides an excellent insight into Greco-Roman art. Popular pieces include four Illyrian, Greek and Etruscan bronze helmets; a Roman mosaic fragment depicting a cockerel and a third century marble head of woman from the city of Palmyra, Syria. The Warwick Vase is the most spectacular object. It is an eighteenth century restoration of a second century monumental marble krater, which once decorated the gardens of the villa of the Roman Emperor Hadrian at Tivoli, Italy. The collection also includes representative examples of Greek ceramics. These, with some fine Greek earthenware figurines and Etruscan ceramics, provide an excellent reference collection for the study of ancient ceramics.

Bibliography


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