Editorial

Dear readers

The diversity of opinions is a significant part of our self-conception. The basis for this should be provided by carefully researched editorial contributions in the media, which enable us to form an independent, critical opinion. It is alarming that well-established media, which we would after all like to trust, currently report on themes such as the ancient art trade in a startlingly superficial manner. The media have always been exploited by politics. Berlin is currently developing new legislation on the ancient art trade. A point of concern is that art dealers were only invited after insisting on being included. They are not, however, on the list of speakers. It is striking that, at the same time, very poorly researched contributions are presented in the German media. These include interviews with so-called representatives of the art market, who do not belong to an association and are, therefore, not committed to observing ethical standards, but who nonetheless pose as experts for the official trade. All this bears witness to a not particularly democratic stance, on the basis of which a law is being created. This is a pity, for there is nothing to be said against the creation of a law that exerts a controlling influence and, at the same time, provides collectors and dealers with legal security. The open and critical, but not biased and superficial, contribution by my old friend Dr. Marc Fehlmann to this issue of Cahn’s Quarterly should be understood in this sense.

Wouldn’t it be more constructive if Berlin would, in the course of this consultation process, take a look beyond its national borders, instead of depending on the one-sided and almost fanatical opinions of certain civil servants or archaeologists? England, for instance, the country with the largest volume of art trade in the world, spent a long time drafting a well-balanced law. Switzerland, too, spent many years of debate before enacting a law in 2005, which resolved many existing deficiencies, especially those regarding free warehouses. It is far from perfect, but this legislation helped calm the situation. It is to be hoped that Berlin will do justice to its constitutional responsibility by listening to all interested parties, and not just to a group of specialists with extreme views, who in several verdicts have been called to moderation by the independent German judiciary.

On 28 January 2015 Herbert A. Cahn would have celebrated his 100th birthday. In this and subsequent issues of Cahn’s Quarterly, we will devote various contributions to him, which will reveal facets of his personality not familiar to many. I hope you enjoy reading these interesting articles, and I hope to see you soon in Maastricht.

Business as Usual

What Do We Do With All Our Books?
The Sense and Nonsense of a Research Library

By Sandra Kyewski

“Of all worlds created by man, that of books is the most mighty.” (Heinrich Heine)

Heine’s dictum may not appear correct to all of us; nonetheless, I was immediately reminded of this quote when I first entered the library of the Cahn Gallery. Room after room, shelf after shelf, a world of its own opened up before me – far away from the general bustle of the gallery. I soon realised that the task assigned to me in October 2014 – the screening, checking and (re)ordering of the library – amounted to a Sisyphean challenge. Whenever I had registered all the books in the database and had ordered them neatly on the shelves according to their subject area,
more boxes of books, in addition to the new acquisitions, would appear from a seemingly inexhaustible source – the storerooms of the gallery.

But what exactly do we do with all these books? A well-sorted, comprehensive and functioning library is indispensable for the daily routine of the gallery’s team of archaeologists. Every ancient object that enters the gallery is carefully studied. Its condition is examined and its date ascertained. A comprehensive description of the piece and the identification of the geographical or cultural context within which it was created are equally indispensable as the research on its provenance. To this end, the archaeologists need comparable objects or earlier publications featuring the pieces. And just these can be found in our library, which is ordered according to the relevant topics. Regardless of whether it is a vase or a sculpture or, for instance, an Egyptian work of art – in our library the archaeologists can quickly find what they are looking for.

To some, the thought of a dim, old-fashioned library with dusty volumes may seem antiquated in the age of online resources, Google and Wikipedia. Let it be said, however, that archaeology – especially as a visual science – is necessarily dependent on the printed medium as a reliable and quotable source. Even though in recent years many excellent projects have been initiated to create online image databases, journals etc. and to digitise information, these are (still) under construction. It is often quicker to consult the standard reference work sitting on the shelf. Furthermore, the trustworthiness of information disseminated on the internet must always be verified.

But let us return to the library in the Gallery Cahn, which has been continuously enlarged. Containing over 11,000 books, it has grown to the size of a considerable research library. Apart from the monographs and reference works on the various periods and genres, it is particularly well-stocked with offprints and old auction catalogues. In contrast, journals are not collected. The foundation of the library was laid by merging the personal library of Herbert A. Cahn with the company library of HAC – Kunst der Antike. We therefore have a great number of duplicates – i.e. two or even more copies of the same publication. It was part of my task to find these duplicates and to remove them – in the meantime, I have filled 90 boxes with these unwanted books! Many of them are reference works, which – I can bear witness to this – would make the heart of any archaeology student beat faster.

So the question posed at the beginning can be asked again: What shall we do with all our books? Jean-David Cahn was disappointed by the limited interest shown by German-speaking universities and research institutes in his previous auctions with archaeological literature. He has therefore decided not to hold any further auctions with books. It is, however, his particular wish that these books be again used for research purposes. We are, therefore, looking for institutions, maybe also in Eastern Europe, which would be interested in such a small but almost self-contained library. We will gladly consider any suggestions you may have.

Welcome

We are delighted that Martin Flashar will take over the column “Highlight” from John Robert Guy, who has now retired. Martin Flashar received his doctorate from the University of Bonn in 1991, where he studied with Niklaus Himmelmann, and habilitated in 2003 at the University of Freiburg im Breisgau. He teaches at Freiberg University and works as an independent art consultant, journalist and author.

Congratulations

Many Happy Returns, Dear Robert!

Last December, John Robert Guy celebrated his 65th birthday and has therewith reached retirement age. We would like to say a heartfelt thank you to you, dear Robert, for your excellent work! We are delighted that, as Honorary Curator of Herbert A. Cahn’s sherd collection, Robert will still occasionally visit us at the gallery. If you have any enquiries pertaining to the sherds, please contact John Robert Guy.
Already in 2013, the Gallery Cahn took the 150th anniversary of the company as an occasion for a historical retrospective. In the year that has just begun, it is Herbert Cahn’s birthday that we commemorate. On 28 January 2015, Herbert Cahn would have turned 100. In 1933, together with his brother Erich and their mother Johanna, he re-established the company, which had originally been based in Frankfurt am Main, in Basle. “I had the great good fortune that I never had to decide what profession to choose, and that, even after having emigrated, I could continue working as a numismatist,” Herbert Cahn wrote in 1982, in his curriculum vitae for the jubilee celebration “50 Years High School Graduation” at the Frankfurt Goethe-Gymnasium. He had finished school there at Easter 1932. This was followed by two semesters of Classical Archaeology and Philology at the University of Frankfurt, where Ernst Langlotz, Ernst Kantorowicz, Max Horkheimer and Martin Buber taught. “On 1 April 1933, I was thrown out of university because I was a Jewish student. After a couple of days, I was permitted to attend classes again because I was the son of a soldier who had fought at the front in 1914-1918. It was clear that we had to leave,” Herbert Cahn relates. In early October 1933, the brothers Herbert and Erich moved to Basle. Their mother followed in 1935. “She was a source of warmth and hospitality for many, both young and old, who shared her lot and either passed through Basle or spent several weeks there, uncertain about what the future would bring.”

In the late 1990’s, I had the opportunity of meeting Herbert Cahn in Basle. At about the same time, the idea originated to write his biography, together with the company and family history. I was entrusted with the company history, from its beginnings to the Cahns’ departure from Germany. In 2001 and 2002, I met Herbert Cahn several times for interviews, which were recorded. In 2013, David Cahn took a first step towards putting order into the extensive written legacy of his father, who had died in 2002. There were numerous surprises. He had no idea about the string quartets and quintets, which his father composed in the 1930’s, and the ramifications of the family were more extensive that presumed.

I was also quite astonished, when my literature research revealed that the Mainz-born founder of the company, Adolph Emil Cahn (1840-1918) had, thanks to his wife Bertha, married into the famous Frankfurt family of booksellers, Joseph Baer & Co. The company had over 1.6 million volumes in their stock and, until it was dissolved in 1933, it was regarded as “a world-class antiquarian bookshop”. Clemens Brentano, Arthur Schopenhauer and Otto von Bismarck numbered amongst their clients. The correspondence between Herbert Cahn and his cousin Edith Loeb, or his school friend Rothbarth, which I found in his estate, convey an impression of his first years in Basle. Based on letters, documents and interviews, the planned two volume history of the company and of the family Cahn will make them come alive, mirroring the times in which they were and still are active.
The Debate

On Toxicity

By Marc Fehlmann

Marc Fehlmann studied Classical Archaeology and History of Art at the Universities of Basle and Zurich, graduated with a MA in Museum Studies at the Courtauld Institute of Art (UCL) in London and received his doctorate in Zurich in 1998.

From 1999-2004 he was curator at the Museum of Fine Arts Berne, thereafter he was Associate Professor in the Department of Archaeology and Art History of the Eastern Mediterranean University in Famagusta, North Cyprus, where he was also concerned with Art Law and the problem of illegal archaeological excavations. He was a Senior Fellow at the College Budapest and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in London. Since May 2012 he is director of the Museum Oskar Reinhart in Winterthur.

Having had the privilege of inheriting a small group of antiquities with a pre-1970 history, I know only too well about the difficulties of missing documentation. My grandparents never kept an invoice of anything they bought, whether it was a painting that had passed through the hands of Ernst Beyeler, or antiquities. This appears to have been quite common among minor collectors for some time, and I could only “remedy” the situation by reconstructing probabilities – or better, by finding solid data through my own research in old auction and dealer’s catalogues. I soon began to add documented pieces that once were owned by Lord Elgin, Ernst Pfahhl, and Jacob Hirsch, among others. I prefer such objects not just because they are out of the post-1970 “danger zone” as determined by UNESCO, which some detractors claim to be totally infested with toxic material, but because I take a fundamental interest in the modern history of an archaeological object or a work of art.

As the director of Switzerland’s oldest collector’s museum, I naturally have a professional as well as moral obligation to conduct due diligence before acquiring a piece for my private enjoyment. Within the sphere of the fine arts, museums, collectors and dealers are likewise faced with provenance issues of a consequential nature, in particular regarding works looted or otherwise acquired during the Nazi era. Yet not everybody has the know-how, time or resources to check thoroughly the legal status or history of ownership of a piece prior to its acquisition. But this begs the question of what society considers to be “legal” and “morally acceptable”, and what price this same society is willing to pay for it.

The looting of the National Museum in Baghdad in 2003, the conviction of Giacomo Medici in 2004, and the more terrifying destruction of archaeological sites from Syria to Afghanistan and beyond have undoubtedly heightened public awareness of the danger posed by such activities to the world’s common cultural heritage. Ethical considerations aside, the legal consequences and financial risks involved in trafficking stolen artefacts seem sufficient to dissuade reputable dealers from getting their hands dirty. However, given the already huge and constantly increasing demand for archaeological material from classical regions, fuelled both by individuals and new museums in new markets, the prospect of any diminution in collecting activity seems remote.

Fortunately, some dealers and auction houses who understand their responsibilities, as well as collectors and museum curators, have developed a taste for works that have a documented history before 1970. This has led to a steep rise in prices for exceptional pieces, since an incontestable history of ownership now carries its own price tag. Museum officials and private collectors might deplore this, but you can’t have it both ways. Furthermore, these developments are still moderate compared to the staggering $1.66 billion spent on contemporary art in four days of auctions in New York last November!

All the same, there are still a lot of players in the market contaminating the efforts of those who do their best to offer antiquities with spotless histories. The bad guys will always be around as long as the social fabric of the western world remains unchanged, and until a much larger political and economic shift takes place on a global scale. Hence the looting and wanton destruction of archaeological sites will not stop when I give up collecting or when responsible dealers cease trading. It is also a fallacy to believe that tougher export restrictions and draconian laws in so-called “source countries” will dissuade collectors and slow down the market, because our western conception of...
Let me draw a comparison with the drugs trade in my own country, Switzerland. The situation here has improved only since the 1990’s, with the implementation of state regulations on heroin use (although we are still waiting for the legalisation of cannabis). It is a truism that this stopped neither the consumption nor the production and smuggling of opiates, but it reduced the level of illicit trade on the streets and made a drastic impact on uncontrolled consumption of low-grade material. Surely, positive results of a similar kind can be expected from a properly regulated antiquities market in “source countries”, even if we accept the inevitable side effects caused by corruption. The sanctioned sale of looted and intercepted material that is not of outstanding scientific or aesthetic importance might, after it has been properly recorded, help to generate desperately needed funds for archaeological research and conservation work in so-called “source countries”, and even produce new jobs for hundreds or indeed thousands of young archaeologists who face unemployment when leaving university.

We cannot change human nature, with its greed, ignorance and misplaced urge to “discover”. But we can at least support those dealers who work hard to improve standards of due diligence and who take great care not to acquire freshly sourced material. It does not help to vilify the art market, museums and private collectors en masse in blogs and via the media. On the other hand, it might help increase the appeal of dealing in and collecting only pieces with a solid history of ownership if buying looted material found itself loudly and publicly tarred with the same anti-social brush as illicit drug consumption, and if acquiring pieces with a clear title conveyed palpable prestige. If we can reach this stage, we may yet be able to change consumer behaviour. In addition, one should allow reputable dealers and the few respectable auction houses access to the archives of convicted smugglers and dealers in Italy and Greece, as part of their due diligence procedures. If two academics with privileged access to these archives police the market, and proceed to cause an uproar and a scandal when they identify a toxic piece in a sale, it might satisfy their own vanity and lend politicians in their circle a “morally sound” cachet, but it does not, however, make looted antiquities go away, or even prevent looting at all.

Until then, we – the collectors – must do our bit towards minimising looting by not buying on ebay or from dealers with dodgy stock. We should buy only from dealers we can trust, in the same way as we would trust our lawyer or dentist. We should also be patient and willing to wait until a piece with a verified or highly probable history of ownership turns up – and likewise be willing to pay for it! Bargains are not to be expected in a luxury market. We may also expect that the debate over collecting antiquities will continue while people will always collect, and others will always loot, whatever the reason.
A HANDLE FROM A LARGE VESSEL. L. 18 cm. Bronze. This finely cast horizontal handle once graced a substantial vessel such as a basin or hydria. The central high-swung loop has faceted surfaces for ease of grip. Its ends terminate each in a palette with diamond-shaped heart, flanked by volutes and sprouting nine sharply ridged leaves. The hearts are pierced to accommodate two disc-headed rivets that originally secured handle to vessel’s body. Both rivets are preserved on the handle’s inner surface, together with a portion of the vessel’s wall. Fine green patina. Formerly estate of Philippe Stoll, Strasbourg, 1960-1980. Greek, 1st half of 5th cent. B.C. CHF 2,000

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A LACONIAN HEAD OF A GODDESS. H. 5.7 cm. Bronze. Small head of a goddess with finely fluted polos. Oval face with large, almond-shaped eyes, rounded nose and full lips. The receding forehead is surrounded by a wreath of parted hair drawn to the back. Three cork-screw curls on the left hand side of the head behind the ear. Part of the original vessel wall above the polos; probably from a hydria. Rear of the polos solid, that of the head hollow. Formerly private coll., The Netherlands (1956-1988). Formerly private coll., The Netherlands (1956-1988). Publ.: C.M. Stibbe, The Sons of Hephaistos (Rome 2000) 143f., illus. 101-106. Greek, Laconian, ca. 640-630 B.C. CHF 4,500

A STATUETTE OF A KOUROS. H. 10.9 cm. Bronze. The nude youth stands frontally on a square plinth in the static pose typical of kouroi. His arms hang straight down and his hands rest against his thighs. The left leg is advanced slightly. The broad shoulders and muscular legs contrast attractively with his slender waist. He wears his hair in a cap-like coiffure, the individual strands of which are rendered by fine incisions. The hair below the nape of the neck is arranged in six broad strands that cascade over his shoulders. Slender face with almond-shaped eyes, fine nose, full lips and pronounced chin. A hole in the plinth and its slight curvature indicate that the kouros was originally an attachment. Slightly worn. Formerly Coll. Thétis, Geneva, Switzerland, prior to 1970. Publ.: J.-L. Zimmermann, Collection de la Fondation Thétis (Geneva, 1987) 146, no. 71 with bibliography. East Greek, mid 6th cent. B.C. CHF 4,500

A LACONIAN HANDLE WITH A WOMAN’S HEAD. H. 6.8 cm. W. 7 cm. Bronze. Curved handle of a vessel; at the transition to the vessel’s body, a woman’s head protome. The face has a pronounced nose and full lips and is raised above the background which is formed by the woman’s long hair. The arms of the handle-attachment end in two serpents’ heads with applied eyes and flashing teeth. The scales on the back of the snake’s heads are indicated by lozenges and dots. Formerly priv. coll., The Netherlands (1956-1988). Publ.: C.M. Stibbe, The Sons of Hephaistos (Rome 2000) 143f., illus. 101-106. Greek, Laconian, ca. 630-610 B.C. CHF 3,600

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A STATER, THASOS. W. 9.09 g. Silver. Obverse: Nude, ithyphallic satyr kneeling to right, holding nymph who raises her right hand, with five fingers showing, in protest. Reverse: Quadruplicate incuse square. Formerly Coll. R. Malby and H. de Nanteuil, Hess-Leu 9, 02.04.1958, 123. Publ.: De Nanteuil 723; Traité IV pl. 321.23. Thasos, 480-470 B.C. CHF 6,500
A STATUETTE OF A GOAT. H. 3.9 cm. Bronze. It stands with legs close together, the left one slightly advanced; its head is turned to the right. The fine and ribbed horns are sharply curved backwards; small pointed ears and beard. Small tail curled at the end of a compact body. The hair on the animal’s back is tightly incised. Legs and left horn partially preserved. Private coll., Zurich. Formerly JDC, Tiere und Mischwesen, Cat. 15, Basle 2003, no. 57 with illus. Greek, mid 5th cent. B.C. CHF 7,500

A REEL WITH QUADRIGA. H. 0.7 cm. D. 2.3 cm. Gold. Fine reel made of two discs of sheet gold with embossed decoration joined by a biconical element. One disc depicts a delicately executed quadriga to left. The two charioteers are crowned by a Nike flying to right. In the exergue, three palmettes. The other disc has a central depression surrounded by ten concentric circles. A small piece of gold in the interior. Somewhat crushed, otherwise intact. Formerly in the stock of a Parisian art dealer, acquired in the 1980’s. Greek, 5th-4th cent. B.C. CHF 15,000

A GORGONEION. H. 8 cm. W. 11 cm. Bronze. Gorgoneion with bared teeth and slanting, almond-shaped eyes which were originally inlaid with ivory (traces preserved). Voluminous, hammered boss-shaped curls with finely incised details frame the forehead. A long, wavy strand of hair behind the preserved ear. Three ornamental furrows above the sharply offset eyebrows. The nose is carefully modelled with pronounced naso-labial folds. Part of the proper right side of the face missing. The missing lower part probably included the Gorgon’s lolling tongue and the part of the head-piece which covered the horses nose. Fragment of a horses head-piece. Coll. Jacques Schotte [1928-2007], Belgium, since 1950. Western Greek, Late Archaic Period, ca. 530 B.C. CHF 12,800

A MESOPHALIC PHIALE. D. 15 cm. Bronze. A small mesomphalic phiale with a low rim and decoration in repoussé technique. A wreath of lanceolate leaves surrounds the omphalos both on the inside and the outside. Small hole in the omphalos closed. Formerly German private coll., 1970’s-1980’s. East Greek-Achaemenid, 6th cent. B.C. CHF 2,400

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A STATUETTE OF A SPHINX. L. 6.3 cm. Bronze. Recumbent sphinx with outstretched forelegs and flexed hind legs, her head turned to her left. Powerful, plastically rendered body with pointed breasts. The sphinx has no wings, which is typical of Egyptian depictions of this mythical beast. Her hair forms a wreath around the smooth crown of her head that is pierced by a vertical drill-hole. Probably an applique. Formerly French art market. Late Hellenistic or Roman, probably Egypt, 1st cent. B.C.-2nd cent. A.D. CHF 3,800

TEN BIRD APPLIQUES. H. ca. 1 cm. L. 1.7-2.3 cm. Silver. Decorated with ornamental bands as well as punched lines and circles. Grooves on the underside. Tail feather of one bird slightly worn. Priv. coll. A. D., Munich, mid 1990’s. Late Hellenistic or Roman, probably Egypt, 1st cent. B.C.-2nd cent. A.D. CHF 3,800

A SET OF APPLIQUES FROM A DIadem. L. 21 cm. Gold. A diadem of finely embossed sheet gold framed by a wave pattern below and a frieze of tongues above. The central frieze depicits from left to right: a quadriga, a centaur, a dancing maenad, a satyr, Dionysos seated with a cloak around his hips, a maenad, a double-aulos player, a Nike with fillet, three dancing maenads, a satyr, Dionysos seated, two dancing satyrs, a centaur. Each element has finely punched holes to fasten it. Sewn onto dark blue velvet. Formerly H.A. Cahn, Basle, Greek, 4th cent. B.C. CHF 6,800

A SPIRAL SNAKE RING. D. ca. 1.5 cm. Gold. A magnificant ring in the shape of a coiled cobra with curved tail. The head and skin of the snake are carefully rendered by delicate engraved lines. Excellent condition. CHF 7,300

A FIBULA WITH PEGASOS AND LION'S HEAD ("MACEDONIAN TYPE"). W. 3.6 cm. Gold. Arched bow with three biconical elements framed by delicate cuffs. One end is decorated by the figure of Pegasos, flanked by two knob-like elements, and a hanger in which the pin was inserted. Silver and gold fibulae of the Macedonian type, with varying decoration, were widespread in northern Greece. Women’s heads sometimes replace the lion’s heads and the pegasos is on occasion accompanied or replaced by the protome of a griffin. Formerly The Thétis Collection, Geneva, Switzerland; acquired prior to 1970. Publ.: J.-L. Zimmernann, Collection de la Fondation Thétis (Geneva 1987) 72 f., 181, no. 130. Greek, Hellenistic, probably Macedonia, last quarter of 4th cent. B.C. CHF 9,800

A SPOUT IN THE FORM OF A BULL’S HEAD. H. 10 cm. Bronze. With heavy dewlap, the bull stares ahead with wide-open eyes. The irises are marked, the nostrils flared, the remaining ear cocked attentively to one side. The horns are short but heavy. Short tufts of hair incised at the transition to the horns. Hollow cast as an applique with a ring at the top and triangular indentations at the back behind the horns and ears, presumably for another, now lost, application. The lower jaw is not modelled as this would have served as the spout. Reworked with blows for recycling as casting material in Antiquity; the right horn and forehead are thus dented and the left side at the back torn off. Formerly Coll. D., Hamburg, formed in the late 1980’s-early 1990’s. Greek, late 5th cent. B.C. CHF 15,000
A TETRADACHM. W. 17.295 g. Silver. Obverse: Bearded male charioteer wearing a long chiton and holding a goad in his right hand and the reins in his left, driving a walking quadriga to right; above, Nike flying right to crown the horses. Reverse: EYPA-KOEIO-N. Head of Arethusa to right, wearing necklace and pearl diadem, and with her hair tied in a krobylos which is bound up and falls over the diadem; around, four dolphins swimming clockwise. Boehringer 166; SNG ANS 51. Formerly Coll. A. Maly, acquired 1966 from Bank Leu. Western Greek, Sicily, Syracuse, about 480-475 B.C. CHF 7,200

A LAMP WITH A BULL’S HEAD. H. 17 cm. Wrought iron. Large open lamp. At one end, the sides are squeezed together to form a nozzle for the wick. The high handle curves inwards and ends in a stylised bull’s head. Leaf-shaped muzzle with hook, a drill hole in the middle. At the transition to the handle, two elegant S-shaped horns curve upwards. The base of the lamp is concave. Comes with its original chain, composed of six links connected by hooks and loops. Surface slightly corroded. Unbroken. Formerly Munich art market, 2008. Scythian, North West Caucasus, 1st-2nd cent. A.D. CHF 5,800

A PELOPHOROS. H. 7 cm. Bronze. The pelophoros stands proudly with her right arm akimbo, looking slightly to the right. Her left arm is raised with the hand held open as if in a questioning gesture. She may have carried a water vessel (as a hydrophoros or hydria carrier). Her peplos is richly decorated with four-pointed stars and cross-hatched trim. Her muscular arms are uncovered. Her hair is parted down the middle, drawn up at the temple and held in place by a fillet that is not shown. Her wide-open eyes and the slightly downturned corners of her mouth lend her a rather severe expression. Solid cast, olive-green patina. Nose slightly worn. Formerly Priv. coll. Lyon, France; acquired in the 1960’s. Greek, 460-450 B.C. CHF 14,000


A TETRADACHM. W. 17.295 g. Silver. Obverse: Bearded male charioteer wearing a long chiton and holding a goad in his right hand and the reins in his left, driving a walking quadriga to right; above, Nike flying right to crown the horses. Reverse: EYPA-KOEIO-N. Head of Arethusa to right, wearing necklace and pearl diadem, and with her hair tied in a krobylos which is bound up and falls over the diadem; around, four dolphins swimming clockwise. Boehringer 166; SNG ANS 51. Formerly Coll. A. Maly, acquired 1966 from Bank Leu. Western Greek, Sicily, Syracuse, about 480-475 B.C. CHF 7,200

AN APPLIQUE IN THE SHAPE OF A WOMAN’S HEAD IN PROFILE. H. 3.5 cm. Bronze. Flat, but painstakingly modelled head of a young woman in right profile. The finely incised locks of hair at the forehead, temples and neck are tucked into an invisible fillet. The expressive face is characterized by prominent eyes with sharply defined upper lids and pierced pupils, a steeply sloping nose and fleshy lips. Dark green to black patina. Applique. Formerly Private Coll. B. M., acquired in 2012 from Ghezelbash, Paris. Previously Drees Gallery, Brussels. Greek, 4th cent. B.C. CHF 5,800

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Recipe from Antiquity

Opsophagia

The Passion for Fish in Ancient Greece

By Yvonne Yiu

Following on our culinary expeditions through the kitchens of the Eternal City (CQ 1-4/2013) and the bakeries and breweries of the Valley of the Kings (CQ 1-4/2014), I would, in this third year of Cahn’s Quarterly, like to lift the lids of some ancient Greek pots and pans and have a closer look at what was eaten in the cradle of democracy.

The classical Greek meal was composed of two elements: sitos (grain, bread, staple food) and opson (what one eats with bread). Wine (oinos) was drunk only once the meal was over, and was accompanied by tragemata (what one chews alongside wine), such as cakes, sweets, nuts and fruit. The sitos generally consisted of lentils, barley or emmer. Lentils were frequently served as a soup, whilst barley and emmer was prepared as a gruel or porridge or used to make bread. The term opson was much broader, and it included vegetables, cheese, eggs, fish and meat. Although the Homeric heroes are frequently represented consuming enormous amounts of roast meat, but never eating fish, the latter does appear to have been the more important comestible, so much so that it was regarded as the opson par excellence. Thus, by the classical period, the word opson could be used specifically to designate fish. In the seventh book of the Deipnosophistae (The Banquet of the Learned), which Athenaeus devotes to fish, Myrtilos explains: “It is no wonder, my friends, that among all the specially prepared dishes which we call an opson, the fish is the only one which has won its way, on account of its excellent eating qualities, to be called by this name, because people are so mad for this kind of food.” (276e-f). Thus, those who went shopping in the agora, in the 4th century B.C., could rejoice with the other old fish-eaters (palai opsophagoi) that the market was euopsos (well-stocked with fish) or deplore its anopsia (lack of fish), and appeal to the opsonomos (magistrate controlling the price of fish) should a quarrel arise with the fishmongers as to the proper price of a fish.

The price difference between everyday fish such as sprats and mullet, and delicacies like perch and eel, was significant and provided the writers of comedy with ample opportuni-ty for fun and mockery. In The Spiteful Man (KA 11, 1-2) Timocles observes: “an agora well stocked with fish is a joy to behold if you can afford it, but beyond endurance if you’re of meagre means”, and he proceeds to describe how the sycophant, known as the Lark, goes to the market with four bronze coins in his pocket, looks at the eels, tunny, rays and crayfish, but, having found out how much they cost, scuttles off to the sprats. Those who, however, did buy such expensive varieties of fish were watched suspiciously by the other market goers. In Antiphanes’s Rich Men (KA 188, 1-19), two fish-lovers observe a certain Euthynus on a shopping spree and get into a panic, because they think that a few rich men are buying up the fish market. They stir up a mob and denounce the presumed perpetrators, concluding their invective with a rather remarkable punch line: “It is not democratic for him to do this and chomp on so many fish”.

Excessive opsophagia was dangerous not only on the stage. In real life, too, it could have dire consequences, as is vividly demonstrated by the court case that Aischines brought against...
Timarchus. In 346 B.C. Aeschines had participated in the unsuccessful peace negotiations with Philipp II and was, therefore, accused of high treason by Timarchus. Aischines countered this incrimination with his speech Against Timarchus, in which he argued that, because of his dissolute lifestyle, Timarchus had forfeited his right to speak before the people. He paints a vivid picture of how Timarchus, as a youth, so lustened after sensuous pleasures that he squandered his entire fortune, and then, unable to do without them, did not shrink from prostituting himself. “He behaved as he did,” Aeschines comments, “because he was a slave to the most shameful vices, opsophagia, expensive dinner-parties, flute-girls, hetaeras, dicing and all those other things by none of which should a free and noble man allow himself to be overwhelmed.” (L.42). This speech brought about the rehabilitation of Aischines; Timarchus, however, was declared atimos (without honour) and thereby lost the political rights of a citizen.

It was not uncommon to associate the eating of fish with erotic activity, as is attested by numerous other sources. A startlingly explicit passage is the eulogy on fishery in the comedy Odysseus by Anaxandrides, where the speaker observes: “What other profession gets youthful lips burning, gets their fingers fumbling, has their lungs gasping for air, in their haste to swallow? And isn’t it only when it’s well stocked up with fish that the agora can bring about sexual intercourse? For what mortal gets a dinner-date if all he finds for sale when he gets to the counter are fish-fingers, or corbs, or a picarel?” (KA 43, 5ff.).

Fish is not only a useful aid when seducing others, but is itself seductive. When, in Diphilus’s play The Merchant, a fish smiles at the Fish-lover, he is ready to pay whatever price the fishmonger asks of him (KA 31), and the slender, writhing eel is regularly likened to the fishmonger asks of him (KA 31), and the Fish-lover, he is ready to pay whatever price lus’s play others, but is itself seductive. When, in Diphi-
mortal gets a dinner-date if all he finds for it’s well stocked up with fish that the agora gets youthful lips burning, gets their fingers 
themselves to such a delicacy, (846, 854-55). I would have liked to treat the gallery’s archaeologists to such a delicacy, whereas Melanthios had similarly bought up everything, fresh eels on the market. Whereas Melanthios had simply come too late, and the other opsophagoi had already bought up everything, fresh eels are not to be found in Switzerland, as the species is protected. So together with Melanthios, I will “intone the lament from Medea: ‘I perish, I perish, deprived of my darlings embodied in beets.’” (1012-14).

Instead of eel, I decided to cook tunny, which was also highly regarded by the ancient Greeks. Steaks from the tunny’s belly and tail were the preferred cuts. When buying such an exquisite food, the master chef Archestra
tus advises, its price should not play a role: “But round the sacred and spacious Samos thou wilt see the mighty tunny caught with eager zeal. [...] Of this you must needs buy in summer the cuts which suit you, without hesitation, and haggle not over the price.” (Ath. Deipn. 301f). In order to fully appreciate its flavour, Archestratus recommends using a simple method of preparation: “As for the amia [bonito], prepare that [...] in any way thou likest. Why need I recite it for thee word for word? For thou canst not possibly spoil it even if thou desire. Still, if thou insist, dear Moschus, on being instructed here also in the best way to dress that fish, wrap it in fig-leaves with a very little marjoram. No cheese, no nonsense! Just place it tenderly in fig-leaves and tie them on top with a string; then push it under hot ashes, bethinking thee wisely of the time when it is done, and burn it not up.” (Ath. Deipn. 278b-c). The Cook in Sotades’s play Locked Up Women proceeds in a similar manner: “Then a widowed bonito, a very fine creature, I soaked just enough in oil, wrapped in swaddling-bands of fig-leaves, sprinkled it with marjoram, and hid it like a firebrand in a heap of hot ashes.” (Ath. Deipn. 293d-e). As no fig leaves are available here in winter, I wrapped the tunny steaks, that I had seasoned with olive oil and marjoram, in banana leaves and then cooked them in hot ashes for about 15 minutes.

Another recipe for tunny can be found in The Love-lorn Lass by Alexis. The Cook in this play uses salted tunny, but the recipe works equally well with fresh fish: “First comes this piece of horatian [salted tunny]; it cost two obols. I must wash it well. Then I will sprinkle seasoning in a casserole, place the slice in it, pour over it some white wine, stir it in oil and stew it until it is as soft as marrow, covering it generously with a garnish of silphium.” (Ath. Deipn. 117d-e).

As the Cook does not specify which spices he prefers, I decided to use cumin, which Archestratus recommends as a seasoning for shark steaks (Ath. Deipn. 310c), as well as finely chopped onions and parsley. I diluted the white wine with vegetable broth in the ratio of 1:2 to prevent the broth from becoming too sour and gently simmered the tunny steaks in it for about 10 minutes. Silphion comes from a plant that already became extinct in Antiquity; like the Romans, we can use asafoedita as a substitute.

For our Quarterly Lunch at the Gallery, I served “Archestratos’s Tunny Steaks” and “Tunny Steaks in the Manner of the Love-lorn Lass” together with stewed chard and barley bread. Like the ancient Greeks, we attempted to eat our food without cutlery, but using bread and our fingers instead. When their fingers got greasy, they wiped them on soft bits of bread and then threw these to the dogs – but this we did not do. The Gallery team was delighted by the rustic simplicity of the food which, as Jean-David Cahn noted, was reminiscent of the Mediterranean Cuisine and did not taste strange at all, despite the somewhat unusual cooking methods.

**Literature:**
Andrew Dalby, Siren Feasts. A History of Food and Gastronomy in Greece, London / New York 1996.

**and cooked in hot ashes ...**

**ready to be served after 15 minutes.**

**TUNNY STEAKS IN THE MANNER OF THE LOVE-LORN LASS**
A Portrait of Ptolemy III Euergétes

By Martin Flashar

In the photograph, it becomes clear – as is evidenced by what is preserved of the neck – how the powerful, over life-sized marble head is turned towards its proper left and is slightly inclined. Already this eye-catching posture suggests that the sculpture depicts an individual – and is not an idealised representation, for instance, of a hero. Further signs for this are the striking forehead, the small mouth, and the personal coiffure. What we see before us appears to be a middle-aged man (35 to 40 years old).

The distinctiveness and recognisability of a human’s appearance, especially of the face, is a central criterion for the art of portraiture. The theoretical discourse on portraiture originated in the European Renaissance, but the art form was already practiced in Antiquity. The portrait can easily be localised. The bold, thick fillet wound around the top and back of the head not only holds the man’s hair in place. The row of dowel holes at the top reveal that it was once adorned with a metal attribute – a wreath or a crown. The diadem, as such a fillet is called, is an element of regal attire and thus defines the social status of the person represented. The portrait is, therefore, of a ruler who reigned, as the style of the piece clearly indicates, in the Hellenistic Period. The more difficult question is: Who is depicted?

The genre of the ruler’s portrait is more difficult to assess in the Hellenistic Period after Alexander the Great than it is later, in the Roman Imperial Era commencing with Augustus. Unlike in imperial Rome, there are no standardised portraits that were reproduced in large numbers and distributed throughout the empire. The Hellenistic kingdoms were politically and culturally more disparate. Royal portraits were not copied in series, but were unique artworks. The low degree of standardisation makes it very difficult to identify the persons depicted. The head discussed here belongs to the series of Ptolemies, that dynasty of Macedonian origin that ruled Egypt, and resided in Alexandria with great magnificence. The fusion with the Egyptian cult led to the creation of a significant number of royal portraits in pharaonic guise, the identification of which is, in general, not possible. Amongst the “Greek-style” portraits, there is, however, a striking similarity between our head and that of Ptolemy III, who ruled from 246-221 B.C., who in good Greek manner bore the honorific title Euergétes (benefactor) as an epithet, and was married to the famous Berenike II of Carthage.

Thus, it is an absolute stroke of luck that the direct comparison with coins of the king (they alone are decisive, because they are inscribed) confirms this identification. Especially an issue of silver drachms from Tarsos, which dates from the years immediately following his accession to power, show the same high and receding forehead, the powerful, slightly arched brows, the small, calm mouth, and especially a coiffure of such similarity that, from the ear to the forehead, one can almost count the individual curls. In the fragmentary discipline of archaeology, things only rarely fall into place so nicely: a high quality marble portrait that definitively depicts Ptolemy III, that king who was so successful with regard to territory, and who was at the same time a patron of education and the arts; in addition to this, the formal substance of the head, which, from an art historical point of view, can well be placed in the decade of 250/240 B.C. – and which was previously owned by the former US ambassador George Crews McGhee (1912–2005), a well informed art-lover, who verifiably acquired the piece before 1954.