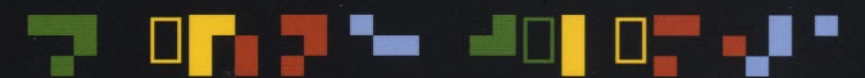




MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS  
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## HIGHLIGHTED WORKS OF ART

2011 SPRING **SUMMER** AUTUMN WINTER

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS – COLLECTION OF ANTIQUITIES

## ANTIQUITIES CONFISCATED AT THE HUNGARIAN BORDERS

Illicit trafficking and trade in cultural objects often causes irreparable damage to the cultural heritage of Hungary and Europe. Pillaging of archaeological sites in particular results in great or total losses of irreplaceable archaeological and historical information related to the object.

Since 1996, the Collection of Classical Antiquities has taken on the responsibility of assembling and protecting archaeological finds of foreign origin seized at the Hungarian border. During the past one and a half decades, as a result of increasingly smooth co-operation between the responsible national institutions – the National Tax and Customs Administration and the National Office of Cultural Heritage – about 4000 objects have been deposited in the store rooms of the Collection and listed separately from ancient works of art owned by the Museum. As a museological research centre, the Collection of Antiquities offered an ideal place for careful archaeological study of the material, with the dual aim of better understanding the art smugglers' methods, and – ultimately, in hope of final restitution – of determining the objects' country of origin.

The smuggled artefacts deposited in the Museum do not as yet contain any antiquities of outstanding value. The latter must have entered the art markets through different routes. Of significance is a silver cup confiscated at Löksháza in 2003. According to the Greek inscription running around the rim it was offered to Apollo as a votive gift by Antiochos and Kallikles, the two sons of Sosos. The cup was made in the third century AD in one of the Greek provinces of the Roman empire.

The majority of objects, however, are mass-produced pieces from the ancient world, made primarily of metal: dress pins (fibulas), rings and keys. In all probability these were found and unearthed from archaeological sites with metal detectors. Besides intact pieces, there are numerous metal fragments as well. Their smuggling is obviously not to be explained from their value in art commerce; melted down, however, they constitute suitable raw material for forgers of antiquities. During the disturbance of the sites, objects made of other materials may also come to light, most often lamps and pieces of glass. Generally, these belong to types widespread over large areas, which makes it almost impossible to identify their exact places of origin. During the study of the material, many artefacts turned out to be fakes. Antiquities forging is thus closely connected to illegal art commerce, and is not oriented solely towards creating pieces expected to be sold for large sums.

The material seized at Battonya in 1996 contained a terracotta statuette of a youth, which could easily sell at a good price as a Hellenistic original in the art trade. Its manufacture, however, clearly betrays it as a fake. The cape folded around the left wrist and the two separate bases beneath the feet are not typical of ancient originals. Another giveaway is the fact that the top of the hilt in the right hand of the youth is not broken off, but was intentionally created as a stump. The piece strongly resembles a well-known Greek marble statue representing Agias, a famous athlete of the fifth century BC, which was erected by a late descendant of Agias in the sanctuary of Apollo in Delphi. Photographs showing the front and back views of this marble statue must have served as a model for creating the Battonya youth. The statuette is relatively well worked out in these two views, closely following its hypothetical forerunner, but viewed from



the sides neither the thickness of the body, nor its fashioning seem appropriate. All this suggests that the object is the product of a workshop, probably made by a beginning forger. The master of the bronze statue confiscated at Komárom in 1996 was far more experienced. At first the seminude statuette of Venus appeared to be an outstanding work of art created in the Roman imperial period. A more thorough analysis

of the statue, however, proved that the surface patina had worn off in places, allowing the shiny surface of the metal to show through. This was quite strange, as ancient bronzes are characterized by a more strongly adherent patina. It is also remarkable that the statue in its posture conforms to neither of the basic representational types of seminude standing Venus seen in Roman art: in the Anadyomene type the goddess, emerging from the sea, lifts her hand to her hair, while the Pudica-type shows her covering her private parts. The Komárom Venus, however, may have held a spear in her lifted right hand, while the object in her left hand escapes identification. Tests carried out by the Archaeometrical Research Group of the Geochemical Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences have confirmed the suspicion aroused by the above facts about the authenticity of the object. The composition of the bronze, the degree of intergranular corrosion, and the characteristics of the corrosion all suggest that the statue was not created in antiquity. The Komárom statue is thus also a fake, but one of very good quality, which could easily have deceived a buyer.

An entirely different story can be reconstructed for the fragmentary marble statuette confiscated together with eight similar pieces at Rösztke in 2003. It is a semi-circular base with only the feet remaining of the male figure it once carried. On the right a bull's head, on the left a fragment of the statue stand is visible.

According to the Latin inscription of the base the statue was once offered to Hercules Invictus. It may have represented Hercules. Between the bull's horns one can see the outlines of a club-end propped against the animal's head. A few additional fragments are also to be connected with the representation of Hercules. Considering the uniform condition of the pieces, these may have belonged to the same find-group. In all probability they may have been votive gifts for a cult place of Hercules in the Roman imperial period. Their fragmentary condition, especially with the dispersal of the group, makes their value in art commerce insignificant. Their value for archaeological scholarship is, however, far greater: for they hint at the existence of an ancient sanctuary, the looting of which is currently taking place. Perhaps the still incomplete archaeometrical analysis and the identification of the marble-type will help to determine where the statues were made, and thus facilitate the identification – and perhaps preservation – of the looted sanctuary.

Besides collecting and securely storing antiquities confiscated on the borders of Hungary, the Collection of Classical Antiquities has also created a database for them (<http://www2.szepmuveszeti.hu/kalypso>). While several international databases have information on stolen and wanted objects, pieces unearthed in illegal excavations are obviously not listed, as these were only discovered when they were smuggled. We hope that the database named after the nymph Kalypso will help to make these objects accessible to all parties involved. On the one hand, it supports the work carried out by the authorities; on the other, it may facilitate the entry of these antiquities into scholarly circulation, and – under fortunate circumstances – their return to their places of origin.



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