Newly Acquired

by CHRISTINE ALEXANDER,

Bronze, in antiquity, was a semiprecious metal, only less subject than gold and silver to being melted down and used again. Since ancient artists and craftsmen put some of their best work on them, ancient bronzes are likely nowadays to be both rare and of artistic interest, and are among the chief glories of all great collections. Famous statues (most of them surviving only in marble copies), statuettes used as votive offerings, utensils, armor, and a great variety of attachments in human, animal, or floral shape, were made of bronze, which is an alloy of copper and tin. The Etruscan workshops rivaled the Greek in proficiency, and the Romans in their turn carried on the tradition. Here illustrated are some bronzes from all three of these civilizations, recently added to our collections.

The bronze fittings from tripods are of cast metal, and therefore often survive the hammered sheet metal of which the utensil itself is made. The bowl with its tripod, shown here, is therefore a considerable rarity. The two are said to have been found together in the same tomb, and are apparently en suite. This kind of stand is called a rod-tripod. Three rods are let into sockets in the lead-filled bronze lion paws that serve as feet; from the feet also rise three tall arcs, which are at once stretchers and supports; three low, arched stretchers also rise from the feet, and are secured by a ring. Each foot, then,
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Curator of Greek and Roman Art

has five sockets, sunk in lead. At the top, this strong, light structure is fitted to a circular flaring member which receives the bowl. The tripod must be strong, for the bowl when filled was a great weight. The fittings at the top of the stand, lions’ heads for the arcs and ducks’ for the rods, have tubes through which the legs are passed. Of lion heads, duck heads, and lion paws there are three each, but no two are exact duplicates. Though tripod fittings are sometimes very sumptuous and elaborate, this kind of tripod is simple and restrained, and very graceful. Our piece is said to have been found many years ago at Orvieto. It is Etruscan, and perhaps made at Vulci in the middle of the sixth century B.C.

Two fairly large statuettes, an acrobat and a rider, belong in their character to the Hellenistic period, though the latter looks to be Roman work.

The rider, whose steed—a horse or other beast—is missing, wears the spoils of an elephant, like a Hellenistic ruler. Both his dress and his face, though this lacks definition, are reminiscent of Alexander the Great. The skin, worn like a chlamys over one shoulder, falls in a deep pouch within the left arm of the rider, whose uplifted right hand holds a round object, as if to throw it. A largesse of some sort? This does not seem to be a man with a weapon in his right hand and holding his chlamys shield-fashion, for if one
arm is turned toward an enemy the other is not. The allusion may be episodic, to one of the processions beloved under the Ptolemies. The statuette was until 1912 in the Dattari collection, and is said to have been found at Athribis in the Nile Delta.

The acrobat is deformed. He has a curvature of the spine, his legs are stunted, and he has the sick, sensitive face of a cripple. But his muscles are strongly developed and his pose is quick and athletic. He is in the midst of an act, perhaps with a partner at whom he is looking. His two hands gripped something that is now missing, but the two are not in a straight line, so it was not a staff. The action is unclear. Greek artists took but little interest in such subjects until the Hellenistic period, when for a few generations they turned out these sensitive pathological studies. The figure is part of something, perhaps of an elaborate lighting fixture. The back of the head is open, as if to receive another member. The eyeballs are missing, and may

Bronze statuette of an acrobat. Hellenistic period. Height 8 5/8 inches

Bronze head with elephant headdress. Height 1 1/8 inches
have been of glass or silver. This bronze was once in the collection of the archaeologist Carlo Albizzati.

A head with an elephant mask worn in the same way is a decoration applied to some utensil. A mate to it is in the Louvre.

Couches, for sleeping and banqueting, often had bronze fittings in human or animal shape. The juncture of a leg and the bed of the couch was masked by a protome, usually of a satyr or an Eros. The Museum has a series of these fittings, to which have been added an Eros and a satyr. Both are late Hellenistic work. The Eros is a long-haired sulky boy, the satyr bald, garlanded, and truculent. His chest hair is in silver inlay.

The tripod: Accession number 55.129.1a,b. Belongs to Group E of P. J. Riis's classification, Rod-Tripods, in Acta Archaeologica, X (1939), pp. 18 ff. Gift of the estate of Jacob Hirsch in memory of himself and his wife, through T. Virzi, the executor, 1955


The rider: Accession number 55.11.11. Purchased with income from the Edith Perry Chapman Bequest, 1955. Published: Gebauer, Athenische Mitteilungen, 63/64 (1938/39), pp. 78 and 105, No. K78, where the older publications are listed. Prof. Otto Brendel helpfully discussed this with me. The tip of the elephant’s trunk, seen in the old illustrations, is modern and has been removed.

The Eros from a couch: Accession number 56.9. Gift of the late Judge Edgar Bromberger in memory of his mother, Augusta, and his wife, Clara Seasongood, 1956

The satyr from a couch: Accession number 55.129.2. Gift of the estate of Jacob Hirsch in memory of him and of his wife, through T. Virzi, the executor, 1955

The head with elephant headdress: Accession number 55.11.12. Rogers Fund, 1955