

HIGHLIGHTS OF ROMAN ART FROM THE LOUVRE

Prepared to complement *Roman Art from the Louvre*, an exhibition organized by the American Federation of Arts and the Musée du Louvre and supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.



Medallion Coin

Ca. 324–26 A.D.

Provenance unknown

Gold, Diam. 3⁵/₈ in.

Purchased in 1973 (bj 2280–inv. mne 684)

The center of this medallion is a double *solidus* (gold coin) with an imperial effigy. Depicted in profile, the Emperor Constantine wears military dress—a cuirass and *paludamentum* (mantle)—and a crown; his right hand is raised in salutation while his left hand holds a globe, the symbol of the universal empire. Originally, there were six busts surrounding the effigy, but only five remain—three female busts on the left and two male busts on the right, all of whose identities are unknown. Each bust is turned in three-quarter view toward the center. The other side of the coin depicts the emperor's two sons, Crispus and Constantine II, both dressed in a *trabea*—the garment of a consul—and holding a scepter surmounted by an eagle.

This medallion was part of a series of five known circular or octagonal pieces. Four appeared on the market in 1970 and were disbursed between the Dumbarton Oaks Collection in Washington, D.C., the British Museum in London, and the Louvre in Paris. The fifth was acquired in 1994 by the Cleveland Museum of Art. All are thought to have belonged to a single necklace. Together they make for an exceptional group, consistent with the type of coin-jewels used in third-century Rome and the empire.



Portrait of an Unknown Woman

Ca. 55–65 A.D.

Provenance unknown

Marble, H. 15 in.; W. 9⁷/₈ in.

Purchased in 1861, formerly in the Campana collection (ma 1269–inv. mne 821)

This unidentified portrait is thought to have originally sat atop a rectangular pedestal forming a herm (a bust on a square pillar), a form of statuary that was popular in Roman times. Here, the face of the woman is large and round, with almond-shaped eyes, wide eyebrow arches, a flattish nose, and fleshy lips. There are no lines or wrinkles to convey expression or provide clues to the model's identity, but the hairstyle, created by a special drill called a *trepan*, is of particular interest.

This bust is dated to the Flavian era, 69–96 A.D. Other female busts in the exhibition that precede it in date illustrate a more natural looking type of coiffure. Here, the hairstyle is more elaborate, with numerous individual curls, a variation on the Greek style popularized in excesses. It also draws on fashions from the Orient: the ringlets echo the styles of Egypt's Ptolemaic princesses.



“The Praetorians Relief”

Ca. 51–52 A.D.

Discovered in Rome

Grey veined marble

H. 63³/₈ in.; W. 48³/₈ in.

Purchased in 1824, formerly in the Mattei collection (ma 1079–inv. II 398)

This piece depicts three soldiers in high relief in the foreground; two others in the background, accompanied by a standard bearer, are in bas-relief. The soldiers wear helmets with high crests and carry shields ornamented with various decorative motifs, including a winged thunderbolt and lightning, foliate designs, and a pattern of intertwining lines. The soldiers’ *calcei* (formal shoes) and cuirasses (armor that protects the chest and back) identify them as high-ranking officers.

This relief once formed part of the Arch of Claudius, erected in 51 A.D. to commemorate the conquest of Brittany (now Great Britain). If the relief refers to Claudius’s triumph in 43 A.D., the men could be officers of a regular legion, allowed to carry arms inside the city walls for the duration of the ceremony. The eagle with folded wings is, however, the emblem of the Praetorian Guard. Indeed, Tacitus recounts that the captured Breton leader Caracatus was paraded in Rome surrounded by Praetorian guardsmen in combat array.



Slave

Early 3rd century A.D.

Discovered in the thermal baths in Aphrodisias (Turkey) in 1904 (Paul Gaudin excavations)

H. 27⁷/₈ in.

Black marble known as Nero antico

Donated in 1995, collection of the heirs of P. Gaudin (ma 4926-inv. mne 1009)

The figure represented in this statue can be identified as a slave by his belted *exomis*, the tunic of artisans and servants, and the *situla* he carries. A *situla* is a globe-shaped container filled with perfumed oil—a common implement used by servants at the baths. According to the writings of Cicero (*Rhetoric to Herennius IV, 50, 6*), Ethiopian slaves were once employed in the thermal baths built by the Emperor Hadrian in the great city of Aphrodisias, in modern-day Turkey.

This figure once decorated a niche in the baths of Hadrian. The use of different colored marbles—black marble known as Nero antico for the body and alabaster for the eyes—was the hallmark of the highly regarded workshops of Aphrodisias. In the imperial era, a school of sculptors flourished in Aphrodisias and rose to prominence under Hadrian.



“Mercury Bottle”

2nd century A.D.

**Discovered in Le Pouzin
(Ardèche, France) Italian or
Rhineland production**

Clear glass, blown in a mold

**H. 10¼ in.; W. (side) 2¾ in.; Diam.
(mouth) 2¾ in.**

Purchased in 1913 (mnd 986)

Bottles of this style are known as “Mercury” bottles because they frequently include a depiction of the god Mercury carved on the bottom. Known as the messenger of the gods, as well as the god and protector of travelers, merchants, and thieves, Mercury’s attributes include a broad-rimmed hat with wings and a caduceus—a staff decorated with wings and entwined serpents. Generally made of thick, clear glass, these bottles were decorated with various motifs, such as a palm designs on the outer surfaces or inscriptions marking the bottom. Their small capacity suggests that they held precious contents, such as balm, perfumed oil, or some pharmaceutical or medicinal product.

Discovered around 1865 in a funerary urn near Pouzin in the Ardèche, this glass bottle was found resting in a small amount of water, which had helped protect it over the centuries.

