

The collection of the Institute of Classical Archaeology University of Vienna

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Abstract

The collections at the University of Vienna's Institute of Classical Archaeology, built up over 150 years, are a crucial asset for the training of today's archaeologists.

The *Archaeologische Sammlung* at the Institute of Classical Archaeology, University of Vienna, is mainly a collection of plaster casts. It came into existence in 1869 when the first professor of archaeology (Alexander Conze) began to buy casts of Greek sculpture. The plan for the new building



of the university (at the Schottenring) included rooms for the cast collection, and in 1884 it found a suitable home there. A small collection of original artefacts (mostly pottery made in the Eastern Mediterranean area) came into being due to private donations. In 1989 the Institute of Classical Archaeology and its *Archaeologische Sammlung* was transferred to the newly founded *Center of Archaeology* in the 19th district (Franz Klein-Gasse

Fig. 1 – Casts of statues from the Hellenistic age

1). The cast collection is presently installed in two large halls where there is also a small room for seminars. The collection of original artefacts is housed in a smaller store room nearby.

Due to lack of staff we cannot offer regular visiting hours. For students of archaeology the collection is accessible whenever one of the members of the Institute is present. Persons wishing to visit the collection are kindly requested to make an appointment.

Plaster casts of sculpture in the round and of reliefs have not lost their importance as tools for teaching and research. In daily life we are used to visual communication by two-dimensional media: texts on paper or screens, images as illustrations in books, newspapers, on bill boards and in the internet. In ancient Greece, however, texts never acquired the importance they have in modern times, and images were not predominantly produced in two-dimensional media. By contrast, statues - in sanctuaries, public places, cemeteries, and (after the 2nd century B.C.) also in private houses - carried many meanings and messages. Placed in open spaces, they were made for inspection and viewing from all sides; an experience that cannot be provided by illustrations, not even 3 D computer simulations. Relief images, with overlapping figures creating their depth of field, were also widespread, attached to buildings or serving as votive offerings or grave monuments. The volumes and foreshortening of relief figures can be fully understood and appreciated only by the perception of the object, not through illustrations that reduce the figures to outlines. Plaster casts of statues and reliefs

are therefore an indispensable asset for the training of archaeologists.

The bulk of the collection consists of reliefs that once adorned buildings (mostly temples) in the main regions of ancient Greek settlements; Greece, Turkey, and Southern Italy, including Sicily. They date from the 6th to the 1st centuries B.C. Selected examples can give a representative overview of the various types of sculpture, the development of style, and the choice of themes and subjects. A special feature of the collection is the great number of reliefs from Lycia (on the southern coast of Turkey), which demonstrate the adoption and adaptation of Greek prototypes and imagery for the purpose of local dynasts' ostentatious display of status. There are also models of buildings - such as the Parthenon in Athens, sepulchral monuments in Lycia, Emperor Diocletian's palace in Split - and miniature reconstructions of the original setting of some sculptures, including pediments of the Parthenon in Athens, and a votive monument in Olympia.

The collection also contains a well-chosen range of votive reliefs and grave reliefs.

The most conspicuous items are the casts of sculptures in the round. The collection offers the



possibility to arrange statues scattered in museums all over the world according to changing demands - providing first-hand visual experience of their spatial dimensions and proportions, and providing evidence for types, styles, clothing, subjects etc. The cast collection invites students and visitors to regard and scrutinize ancient objects under the conditions and in the atmosphere of a workshop.

Fig. 2 – Casts of architectural sculpture from ancient Greece

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http://bibliothek.univie.ac.at/sammlungen/archaologische_sammlung.html