



A SELECTION OF THE MOST IMPORTANT EXHIBITS



Bacchus

Jan van Dalen (before 1620 Antwerp ? - after 1653)

dated 1648

canvas, h. 72 cm, w. 58,2 cm

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv.no. 1687

Bacchus, the ancient god of fertility and wine, was the son of Zeus, the father of the gods, and his mortal lover, Semele. He taught man how to cultivate vines, and invited them to forget their every-day cares and social differences in ecstatic celebrations. With his open handling the Flemish artist Jan van Dalen's gives us a deity whose mischievous, challenging gaze seems to invite us to enjoy a glass of wine with him. He has a wild and boisterous character that disregards and transgresses limits and borders - emphasized here by the wreath of ivy.



Grapes with Butterflies

Philipp Ferdinand de Hamilton (c. 1667 Brussels - 1750 Vienna)
before 1747

canvas, h. 58,5 cm, w. 41,5 cm

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv.no. 7663

The detailed rendering of the grapes and butterflies and the comprehensive views - for example, the leaves are shown from all sides - give the painting the character of a scientific illustration, inviting the classification of the depicted object. The aesthetical rendering of the carefully-handled grapes by the imperial painter Phillip Ferdinand de Hamilton offers us a charming virtuoso interpretation of nature.



St. Michael's Goblet

Antwerp, 1532

gold, partly enameled, precious stones, pearls, h. 51,7 cm

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstammer, inv.-no. KK 1120

This lidded goblet was among the gifts that king Charles IX of France presented to Archduke Ferdinand II of the Tyrol, the uncle of his bride Elisabeth of Habsburg, on the occasion of their marriage in 1570. The elegant gold goblet is embellished with a profusion of precious stones and pearls. The reliefs on the cup feature erotic-bacchanalian and wine-making scenes such as harvesting grapes and pressing them in a large wooden tub.



Wilton Chalice with Paten and Drinking Straws

Lower Saxony (?), c. 1160/70

gilt silver, niello, chalice: h. 16,7 cm, paten: diam. 23,5 cm

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstammer, inv.no. KK 8924

In the Middle Ages the faithful sometimes used such drinking straws (*fistulae*) to sip the sacred wine of the Eucharist from a chalice. Note the elaborate engravings and the complex Christian iconological programme on both chalice and paten, making the Wilton Chalice one of the foremost such ensembles to have come down to us.



Tapestry Featuring a Mythological Scene:

Mercury Placing the Infant Bacchus in the Care of the Nymphs

Brussels, c. 1695, design: Lodewijk van Schoor, cartoon: Lodewijk van Schoor and Lucas Achtschellinck (attributed), weaver: Jacob van der Borcht; marked the mark of Brussels, and I.V.D.B.

warp: wool; weft: wool, silk, gold and silver threads, h. 346 cm, w. 464 cm

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstammer/Tapestry Collection, inv.no. T LXXIX/4

The tapestry *Mercury Placing the Infant Bacchus in the Care of the Nymphs* is from the KHM's rich tapestry holdings. It was woven in Brussels after a design by the celebrated Lodewijk van Schoor (c. 1650-1702), who helped to popularize French taste in contemporary Flemish tapestry production. This tapestry is based on a painting by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) that depicts the birth of Bacchus.



Trick Chair

Germany, 2nd half of the 16th century

iron, h. 114 cm, w. 60 cm, d. 60 / 52cm

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Collections Ambras Castle, inv.no. KK 289

The back of this iron chair is decorated with engraved floral-grotesque ornaments and hunting scenes. It was probably used to entertain guests during drinking games at Ambras Castle. Anyone sitting down inadvertently activated a hidden mechanism that trapped him in the chair. To be released, the guest had to pass a “drinking challenge”. We cannot know for sure that this chair was used during drinking games held in the Bacchus Grotto but it seems very likely.



Lidded Goblet featuring Bacchanalian Scenes

Augsburg, 2nd quarter of the 17th century, circle of Georg Petel, Ferdinand Murmann (?)

ivory, gilt silver, h. 38 cm

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstammer, inv.no. KK 4519

The bacchanalian scenes on this lidded goblet feature numerous erotic details. A clearly drunken Bacchus leaning on a nymph and an equally inebriated Silenus forms the centre of the composition. The lid features a dancing putto pressing juice from some grapes directly into his mouth. The sensual baroque composition of this boisterous group is informed by a painting of the same subject by Peter Paul Rubens. It illustrated the dangers of consuming too much wine.



Automaton: The Triumph of Bacchus

Augsburg, 1602-1606, Hans Schlottheim, Sylvester II Eberlin
 gilt silver, painted, movement: brass and iron, h. 43 cm, l. 53 cm, w. c. 17 cm
 Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstammer, inv.no. KK 959

This table automaton, once in the Kunstammer of Emperor Rudolf II in Prague, is one of the most important examples of its kind. The virtuoso handling and expensive materials of this seminal Kunstammer object - an internal mechanism allows it to roll across the table while the figures move and music is played - are the result of the highly productive collaboration between the Augsburg goldsmith Sylvester II Eberlin and Hans Schlottheim, Augsburg's leading clock- and automaton-maker at the turn of the 16th century. The head of the billy-goat can be removed and used as a drinking vessel, which suggest that the automaton may have played a part in princely drinking games.



Statue of Dionysus/Bacchus

Roman, 2nd century A.D.

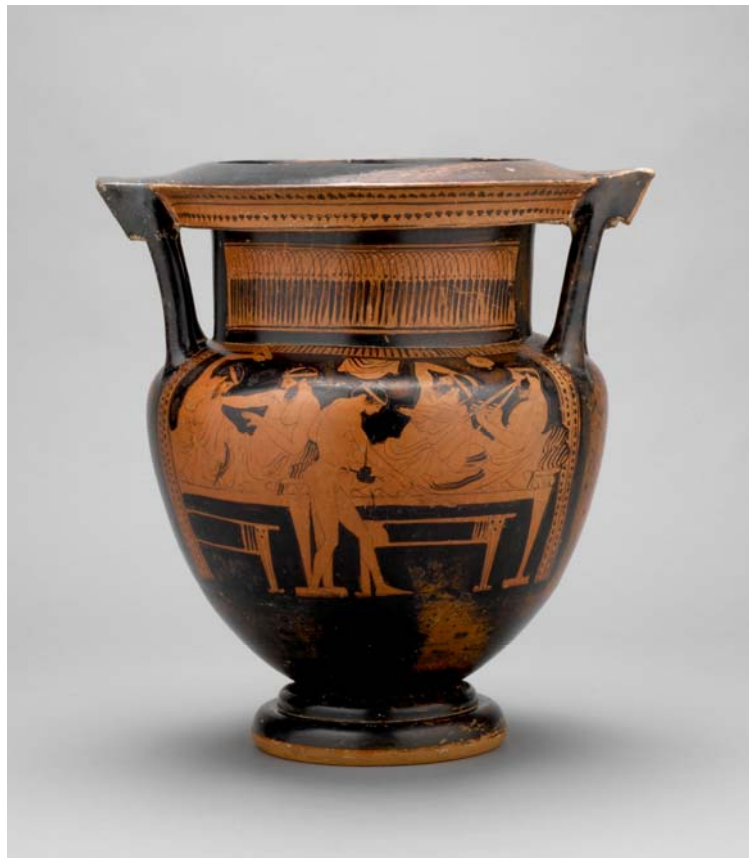
from Carthage (Tunis, Tunisia)

marble, h. 180 cm

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities, inv.no. I

156 a-b

Here Dionysus (Bacchus in Rome), the god of wine and fertility, is depicted as a young man. He is easily identified by his attributes: his head is wreathed in ivy, vine leaves and two large bunches of grapes; his lowered right is clasping a kantharos (a drinking cup) while his (now lost) left hand probably once held a thyrsus, a long staff topped with a pine cone. A tree stump, also decorated with ivy and grapes, forms the statue's support. Dionysus is accompanied by a panther that is now sadly missing its head and front legs. Archaic and early Classical works depicted Dionysus as a bearded and venerable old deity, but in Roman art we generally encounter him with the body of a young athlete.



Krater (Mixing Vessel): Men at a Symposium

Greek, Athenian red figure vase, 2nd quarter of the 5th century B.C.

terracotta, h. 46,5 cm

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities, inv.no. IV

824

The front of this Greek krater from the 5th century B.C. depicts a symposium, a drinking party. The ancient Greeks always watered their wine, mixing it with water in large open vessels like this one.

In the foreground a nude young cupbearer is busy with a strainer and a drinking cup. Behind him four bearded men share two klinae, or couches. One of the men is clutching a drinking cup in his left hand and singing, accompanied on an aulos by a fellow guest. The other two drinkers are engrossed in a game of kottabos. Its aim was to fling the dregs of wine in a cup at a small metal plate placed on a staff in order to bring it crashing to the ground.



The Triumph of Bacchus

Maerten van Heemskerck (Heemskerck 1498 - 1574 Haarlem)

c. 1536/37

oak panel, h. 56,3 cm, w. 106,5 cm

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv.no. 990

This Triumph of Bacchus by the Dutch artist van Heemskerck is a sumptuous, clever and also humorous depiction of a state of frenzy and ecstasy achieved through wine and dancing. The clearly drunk nude deity clutching a cornucopia filled with grapes sits atop a chariot drawn by a donkey. His boisterous retinue comprising maenads, satyrs, putti and musicians have joined the procession that is passing through a triumphal arch to his temple on a hill. The combination of a typical emphasis on three-dimensional, rounded figures (informed by Roman models) and a brilliant palette results in a powerful composition.



Autumn (Moses Receiving the Ten Commandments)

Jacopo da Ponte, called Jacopo Bassano (1549 - 1592 Bassano)

c. 1576

canvas, h. 75,5 cm, w. 109 cm

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv.no. 4304

This painting depicts autumn in a way typical of many paintings of the seasons: a large barrel is being transported on a cart drawn by a team of oxen; the painter lovingly dwells on rural activities such as harvesting, transporting and pressing grapes. The biblical scene in the background shows Moses receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, adding a religious connotation to the composition.