
**KUNST
HISTORISCHES
MUSEUM
WIEN**



Vitrine EXTRA #2
Back in the Future – A Cup's Story
1 June to 1 October, 2023
Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities

The Vitrine EXTRA series presents different ancient artefacts temporarily in the permanent exhibition of the Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities at regular intervals. The second edition entitled *Back in the Future – A Cup's Story* lets visitors trace the history of a Greek cup from its manufacture in the late sixth century BCE to the present day.

What is known about the origin of the cup with the depiction of two naked ephebes, how it finally ended up in the Kunsthistorisches Museum – first illegally, finally legally – and why the restitution to the heirs of the former Jewish owner Albert Pollak took until 2022 – all this is addressed in the current presentation.

Made 2,400 years ago in ancient Greece

The lively scene of two young men (*ephebes*) running was painted on a small cup in a Greek pottery workshop in the late sixth century BCE – and thus began the cup's eventful and moving story through several millennia.

We know nothing more about its earliest owners or its use in everyday life or as a burial object. Neither the potter nor the painter signed their names, as was often the case with

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ancient vases. On the basis of stylistic criteria, however, the cup can be attributed to an early Classical painter who produced around 150 extant works in the late sixth and early fifth century BCE.

The scene takes us into the world of athletes and sporting competitions (*agones*), which was so important for the ancient world. It might be a training session in a wrestling school (*palaestra*); in ancient gymnasia – places of physical and intellectual training – participants usually fought in the nude (ancient Greek *gymnós*, γυμνός, ‘nude’).

The art collector Albert Pollak and confiscation by the Nazi regime

The cup’s journey from antiquity through the Middle Ages to today must remain largely in the dark due to a lack of documentation. In the early twentieth century, it entered the collection assembled by art collector Albert Pollak in Vienna. By now, the cup had become a collector’s item – produced at a time when Jewish culture was already established in the vicinity of the Greek world

Today, the name of Albert Pollak is known to a large number of Austrian museums: Persecuted by the Nazis in Vienna after the ‘Anschluss’ in 1938, arrested and robbed of his possessions, he managed to flee to his native town of Bielitz/Bielsko (in today’s Poland). He was unable to take his extensive collection of paintings, ornamental objects made of porcelain or glass, textiles from all over the world, furniture, and other art and cultural objects, which he had built up over more than thirty years, with him. It was seized by the Nazi regime, divided up, and distributed among numerous museums. When the German Wehrmacht marched into Poland, Albert Pollak fled to the Netherlands, but was deported later to the Westerbork transit camp and died in Groningen University Hospital in 1943.

Restitution to the heirs of Albert Pollak

Sequestered by the Nazis in 1938, the cup passed to the so-called ‘Central Depot for Confiscated Collections’. Thus already in the immediate vicinity of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, in the Neue Burg, it found its way via the Institute for the Federal Monuments Authority of Austria into the holdings of the Kunsthistorisches Museum's Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities in 1941.

After the end of the war, Albert Pollak’s siblings started searching for the more than 800 objects formerly in their brother’s collection. As a result of their efforts, part of the collection was returned to them in accordance with Austria’s post-war restitution laws. In return for the necessary export permits – after 1945 the family lived in various countries of exile – the heirs had to leave individual objects behind and give them to the museums as “gifts” – including that Attic cup from the 6th century BC.

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It was not until the Austrian Parliament passed the Federal Art Restitution Law in 1998 that this discriminatory practice of so-called 'export dedications' was taken into account. In 2001, on the basis of this new law, the Art Restitution Advisory Board recommended that the Attic clay cup be returned to Albert Pollak's heirs. The subsequent search for Pollak's legal heirs proved to be difficult and protracted. In 2022, the clay cup was finally returned to his heirs; the museum subsequently bought it back from them a few months ago.

As part of the presentation Vitrine EXTRA #2, the cup is now being presented for the first time in the premises of the Collection of Classical Antiquities of the Kunsthistorisches Museum – and in doing so, we also remember the art collector Albert Pollak, who was forgotten for decades.

Cooperation partner:

Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport – Commission for Provenance Research

Exhibition website:

www.khm.at/en/visit/exhibitions/vitrine-extra-2/

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PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

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Cup with Two Nude Ephebes

Attic, red-figure vase

Late 6th cent. BCE

Clay

Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna

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OPENING HOURS

June, July and August:
Daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Thu till 9 p.m.

From 1 September:
Daily, exc. Mondays, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Thu till 9 p.m.

TICKETS

All tickets and offers are available in the online ticket store:
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Besides your medium, we ask you to specify the date of your visit and provide a scanned copy of your valid press pass.

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