

## Opening Times

Open daily 10.00 - 18.00  
Last admission 17.15

## Admission

£5 (£4 concessions)  
Free audioguide included  
with admission to  
*The Road To Byzantium*  
(subject to availability).

## Free Admission

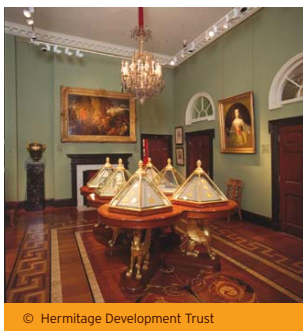
Free at all times for under  
18s, full-time UK students,  
registered unwaged and  
Friends of the Courtauld  
Institute of Art.

For discounted **group rates**  
call 020 7420 9410.

Somerset House is also home  
to the **Courtauld Institute  
of Art Gallery** and **Gilbert  
Collection**. Why not make a  
day of your visit and explore  
all three collections? Savings  
available with Joint Tickets  
and Three Day Passes.

## The Hermitage Rooms Shop

A variety of gifts and  
publications inspired by  
*The Road to Byzantium*  
exhibition and The State  
Hermitage Museum are  
available, including a fully  
illustrated exhibition  
catalogue, price £20.  
For further information  
email: [hshop@somerset-  
house.org.uk](mailto:hshop@somerset-house.org.uk) or call  
020 7420 9404.



© Hermitage Development Trust

## Eating and Drinking

A wide range of refreshments  
is available at Somerset  
House. Both the Deli and the  
Courtauld Gallery Café serve  
a variety of light meals, snacks  
and drinks and are open daily  
from 10.00 to 18.00.

## What's On

Visit [www.courtauld.ac.uk/  
ebulletins.html](http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/ebulletins.html) to sign up  
for free e-bulletins about  
Hermitage Rooms events  
and exhibitions.

## Contact Us

Hermitage Rooms  
Somerset House, Strand  
London WC2R 1LA

T: 020 7845 4630

(24 hour recorded  
information line)

E: [info@hermitagerooms.org.uk](mailto:info@hermitagerooms.org.uk)  
[www.hermitagerooms.org.uk](http://www.hermitagerooms.org.uk)

All details are correct at time  
of going to press.

## Coming Soon

### The Triumph of Eros:

Art and Seduction in  
18<sup>th</sup> Century France

Opening October 2006

This exhibition brings  
together a wide range of  
material from the Hermitage's  
rich collections, including  
paintings, drawings, furniture  
and a recently discovered  
group of prints depicting  
scenes from the education  
of Eros to explore the theme  
of art and seduction in 18<sup>th</sup>  
century French culture.  
Housed in the period setting  
of the Hermitage Rooms,  
the exhibition will offer a  
sumptuous visual experience  
uncovering the complex  
language of eroticism in the  
fine and decorative arts.



Jean Honoré Fragonard *The Stolen Kiss* late  
1780s (detail) © The State Hermitage Museum

# THE ROAD TO BYZANTIUM

## LUXURY ARTS OF ANTIQUITY

30 March - 3 September 2006



## Exhibition Guide

HERMITAGE ROOMS  
ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ  
ЭРМИТАЖ  
at SOMERSET HOUSE

For a large print version of this exhibition guide  
email: [info@hermitagerooms.org.uk](mailto:info@hermitagerooms.org.uk) or call 020 7420 9411.

# THE ROAD TO BYZANTIUM

LUXURY ARTS OF ANTIQUITY

30 March - 3 September 2006



Attic red-figure pelike. First Swallow of Spring, c.510 BC © The State Hermitage Museum

## Introduction

The State Hermitage Museum has one of the most spectacular collections of Classical and Byzantine art in the world. *The Road to Byzantium* presents an important selection of this material, chosen by scholars from the Hermitage and the Courtauld Institute of Art, to tell a little-known story of the survival of the classical tradition in the luxury arts over more than 1,500 years.

The 'luxury arts' are finely crafted works in valuable materials like gold, silver or semi-precious stone, usually made for wealthy patrons. These art forms are essential for explaining the survival of ancient classicism. They show how certain styles and subjects were developed in ancient Greece and adapted in the Roman world. It is in the luxury arts above all that ancient classical conventions continued to be used through the Byzantine Middle Ages, long after they had disappeared from other art forms.

## The origins of Classical Greek art

Around 500 BC, Greek artists developed sophisticated techniques of representing people and things in a manner true to life. These works display sensitivity to anatomy, the suggestion of dynamic, lifelike movement,

and the plausible depiction of bodies in space. However, Greek art also tended to idealise its subjects. Figures were portrayed with a perfect physique, youthful features, and calm, expressionless faces. The combination of fidelity to nature with a restrained, harmonious idealism is the hallmark of classical naturalism.

These unprecedented artistic developments - sometimes referred to as 'the Greek Miracle' - are beautifully expressed in the red-figure technique of vase-painting, invented in Athens (Attica) around 530 BC. The colour of the figures is derived from the distinctive hue of Attic clay. Their dark background and internal details were painted on using a clay slip which turned black during firing. This allowed figures to be drawn with great fluidity and subtlety, as we see in the 'First Swallow' pot, painted by one of the earliest exponents of the technique.

## The spread of classicism: Treasures of the barrows

The exhibition presents a range of luxury artworks, alongside the red-figure pottery, that come not from mainland Greece or the Aegean, but from the Northern Black Sea region, on the fringes of the Greek world. Objects such as the extraordinary Scythian



Dish with herdsman and goats  
Constantinople 527-565 AD (detail)  
© The State Hermitage Museum



Dish with Silenus and a Maenad  
613-629/630 AD (detail)  
© The State Hermitage Museum

gold quiver cover demonstrate the beginnings of the spread of the classical tradition to other areas and cultures.

The Scythians - part of a nomadic culture that extended across central Asia - were already settled on the northern Black Sea coast when the Greeks colonised the area in the sixth century BC. Throughout the fifth and fourth centuries BC Scythian and other indigenous communities lived in very close proximity to the colonists. The treasures excavated from the funerary barrows (*kurgans*) of the Scythian nobility offer a spectacular glimpse of the cultural interaction that existed between them. Among the Scythian grave goods were many precious works in silver and gold that were clearly made by Greek craftsmen. Works of this kind rarely survive from other parts of the Greek world.

#### The Roman luxury arts

By 30 BC, most of the Greek world had come under Roman rule. The Romans admired and adopted many aspects of Greek culture, including its artistic traditions.

The Roman portrait sculptures on display show a range of responses to Greek art, from the sensitive and realistic bronze bust that

draws on Hellenistic portraiture, to the highly idealised, classicising image of Livia, the wife of the Emperor Augustus. But striking adaptations of Greek styles and subjects are often also found in the 'minor arts', notably in precious luxury objects such as cameos and engraved gems.

As early as the third century AD, there are signs that the classical tradition in Roman art was weakening and that tastes were changing. Increasingly we encounter works that ignore the naturalistic principles of classical art. Figures start to be represented in a stylised, symbolic manner with distortions of space and scale. The fourth-century silver bowl representing the mounted Emperor Constantius II (337-361) exemplifies this tendency.

Coinciding with the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, the period of late antiquity - around the fourth century AD - is often imagined to mark the end of classical art and the start of a new, medieval tradition. However, the extraordinary classicising cameo showing the crowning of the Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337), anticipates what is shown in the second part of the exhibition: that ancient

classicism was to survive in the luxury arts for centuries to come.

#### Coptic textiles and classicism

The Hermitage has a magnificent collection of textiles from Coptic (early Christian) Egypt; they belonged either to hangings used for decorating rooms or to tunics. The majority selected here date from the fourth century AD, though some are considerably later. Many bear images from classical mythology, including a scene from Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytos*. The later pieces on display show the vitality of these traditions both during the Christian centuries in Egypt, and after the Islamic conquest of AD 642.

At the end of the fourth century, the pagan cults in Egypt were officially suppressed. Temples were either destroyed or converted into churches. However, the textiles on display here demonstrate that while state support for pagan religions was ending, their imagery remained potent. Pagan mythology was still literally woven into the fabric of everyday life. The images of pagan gods remained popular for many reasons. They acted as protective amulets, conferring the power of the old gods on the wearer. The stories were still a living part of the culture, whether as popular stories or texts to be

used to educate young men. Equally, the stories could be understood as allegories of Christian beliefs: for example, the labours of Herakles can be interpreted as a model for the Christian struggle for salvation.

#### The luxury arts in early Byzantium

The works in this part of the exhibition, such as the wonderful dish showing Silenus and a Maenad dancing, are central to our understanding of how the styles and stories of the classical world survived in the eastern half of the Roman Empire - Byzantium - after the rise of Christianity. Imperial control stamps on the silver objects, much like modern assay marks, allow us to date the pieces with great accuracy. They prove that some of these dishes were made as late as AD 651 - a fact belied by their mythological imagery and lively naturalistic style.

The dishes show the vibrancy of the classical tradition at a time of enormous change in Europe and the Mediterranean. The seventh century AD saw the birth of Islam as the third great monotheistic religion, its armies robbing Byzantium of its territories in Syria and Egypt and replacing the Sasanian Empire in Persia. The magnificent pieces in this room show that, despite these changes to the religious and political landscape,



Textile representing goddess Ge  
4th Century AD (detail)  
© The State Hermitage Museum

people in the Byzantine Empire continued to live as Romans, cherishing the traditional imagery of the classical world. The Pereshchepina treasure was an object of diplomatic exchange with the rulers of Great Bulgaria, demonstrating that the ideas of civilisation encompassed in classical culture, notably the luxury objects of feasting, could be used as a vehicle of diplomacy.

#### The survival of classicism in medieval Byzantium

Byzantine culture in the Middle Ages is almost exclusively thought of in religious terms: its icons of Christ and the Virgin, its churches glittering with mosaics. The objects in this room show that this picture of a culture dominated by Christianity tells only one side of a more complex story. At the same time as icons were venerated, men and women still celebrated the depiction of the gods and myths of antiquity.

An exhibition organised by The State Hermitage Museum and the Courtauld Institute of Art and supported by Alpha Bank London, The Blavatnik Family Foundation, The J.F. Costopoulos Foundation, Cycladic Capital LLP, The Sir Joseph Hotung Charitable Settlement, The A.G. Leventis Foundation and SETE S.A.

Using similar metalworking and carving techniques employed by craftsmen in the fifth century BC, artists continued to produce objects in precious materials depicting the same myths and using the same naturalistic style. These objects demonstrate the tenacity of the classical tradition more than fifteen hundred years after its first emergence. Proverbially, the best artists in medieval Constantinople were still compared favourably to Pheidias, the most famous artist of Greek antiquity.

This room also includes a case of objects made outside the Greco-Roman world: in Persia and Central Asia. The four dishes, of very different dates, show the diffusion of classical ideas in the east over many centuries. They tell a parallel story to that in the rest of the exhibition of the continuing allure and influence of classical forms among the neighbours of the Greeks, Romans and Byzantines.

## Special Events

### Lunchtime Talks

**The Road to Byzantium**  
Each Friday, 13.15 - 13.35

Talks exploring different aspects of this extraordinary exhibition. Hermitage Rooms. Free with gallery admission (£5/£4), no booking necessary.

### Special Lecture

**The Road to Byzantium**  
Tuesday 25 April, 18.00

Dr Peter Stewart and Dr Antony Eastmond discuss this major exhibition. Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre, Courtauld Institute of Art. Tickets £5, please pay on the door (150 seats), includes drinks.

### Study Day

**The Road to Byzantium**  
Saturday 10 June, 10.30 - 16.00

Speakers include Dr Peter Stewart and Dr Antony Eastmond. Tickets £30 (£20 concessions). To book please call 020 7420 9406.

### Free Family Workshops

**Classic Cameos**  
Saturday 29 April, 14.00 - 15.30

Visit the exhibition and discover the art of making cameos, and then make your own.

**Silver Stories Saturday 3 June, 14.00 - 15.30**

Explore the exhibition and then make your own treasure inspired by the stories from classical times.

For families with children aged 6 - 12 years. Meet at the Information Desk in the Seamen's Hall. Free, no booking, limited places.

### Schools & Access Programmes

The Hermitage Rooms also offer an extensive programme for primary and secondary schools, as well as on-site and outreach workshops for special or hospital schools or community groups, picture descriptions for visually impaired visitors and BSL interpreted talks for deaf or hard of hearing visitors.

### For Further Information

Tel: 020 7420 9406  
Email: [education@somerset-house.org.uk](mailto:education@somerset-house.org.uk)  
[www.courtauld.ac.uk/learning](http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/learning)

### Hermitage Rooms Special Lecture Series

**Sèvres Porcelain in**  
**The State Hermitage Museum**  
Monday 22 May, 18.30

Rosalind Saville, a leading expert on the history of Sèvres porcelain, will discuss The State Hermitage Museum's extraordinary collection. Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre, Courtauld Institute of Art. Tickets £10. Booking essential, please call 020 7420 9406.

Organised jointly by the Courtauld Institute of Art, the Friends of the Hermitage and Learning at Somerset House.



Sardonyx cameo depicting Constantine the Great  
crowned by Constantine 4th Century AD (detail)  
© The State Hermitage Museum