

Background information

Berlin, 2 March 2011

The Collection of Classical Antiquities, part of the National Museums in Berlin

The National Museums' Collection of Classical Antiquities is one of the most famous museum collections of Greek, Etruscan and Roman archaeology anywhere in the world. It is now on display in three separate venues on the Museum Island. Works of Etruscan, Roman and Greek art are on view in the Altes Museum, while the Pergamonmuseum contains architectural monuments such as the Pergamon Altar and the Market Gate of Miletus. The Neues Museum currently has art from ancient Cyprus and finds from the Roman provinces on show. In addition, the Collection of Classical Antiquities is represented by some outstanding exhibits in the Archaeological Promenade, which links all archaeological collections on the Museum Island together and deals with broader cultural themes such as language and writing, death and transfiguration and the art of remembrance in ancient cultures.

The Berlin Collection of Classical Antiquities is one of the oldest of its kind north of the Alps. It looks back on more than 300 years of tradition and arose from the electoral cabinet of art once housed in the palace. The first museum building in Berlin to open to the public, the Altes Museum, was designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel. It opened in 1830 and originally housed the collection. After the major excavations in the late 19th century, the construction of a new museum became necessary to house all the objects that had been left to the Berlin museums after the newly excavated finds had been divided up, especially as these predominantly consisted of large-scale architectural structures and fragments of sculptures. In 1930, the Pergamonmuseum was opened. Its architectural rooms housed impressive reconstructions of the Pergamon Altar, the Market Gate of Miletus and other architectural samples. As a result of the Second World War, the Collection of Classical Antiquities' holdings were divided up for decades between East and West Berlin.

The Collection of Classical Antiquities is currently being newly installed in its principal home, the Altes Museum. Since July 2010, Etruscan and Roman art has been on show in a completely new arrangement in the exhibition ITALIA ANTIQUA on the upper floor. The art of imperial Rome is represented by such famous sculptures as the 'Green Caesar' and the portrait of Cleopatra. Statues, sarcophagi, mosaics, frescoes and mummy portraits from Roman Egypt combine to form a magnificent panorama of Roman cultural history. From 24 February 2011 onwards Greek antiquities will be on view for visitors to enjoy, in a completely newly designed exhibition on the main floor.

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PAGE 1 OF 1

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