New Haven, Connecticut, August 22, 2014 — The Roman Empire was vast and diverse, but the inhabitants of even its most far-flung provinces—Britain, Gaul, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, and Tunisia—were all, to some degree, “Roman.” Roman in the Provinces: Art on the Periphery of Empire examines the interaction between local traditions and Roman imperial culture through works of art and artifacts reflecting daily life, politics, technology, and religion. The juxtaposition of mosaics, ceramics, sculpture, glass, textiles, coins, and jewelry presents a rich image of life in the Roman provinces. The exhibition features more than 150 objects from across the empire, including works from Yale University’s excavations at Gerasa and Dura-Europos, many of which have rarely or never before been on view.

Exhibition Overview

The objects on display in the exhibition reveal the multitude of ethnicities, religions, and cultures found within the broad expanse of the Roman Empire. They demonstrate how many groups of people within Rome’s provinces sought to maintain their own local traditions and individuality while also representing themselves as Roman, especially in public contexts and in the sight of the emperor. “Recent scholarship has shown a previously unrecognized complexity of provincial identities, which evolved over time as the culture and manners of the Roman conquerors fused with local traditions,” explains Lisa R. Brody, Associate Curator of Ancient Art, Yale University Art Gallery, and co-organizer of the exhibition. “This fusion happened quite differently in various corners of the empire and in diverse contexts. For example, inhabitants of a particular province might speak Latin and wear togas in public, especially when the Roman military or emperor came to town, while still worshipping local household gods and dining on traditional foods in the privacy of their homes.”

As Rome grew, the experiences of its new subjects were likely both positive and negative, generating widely different responses to the conquerors and their language, religion, art, and architecture. Roman in the Provinces steps away from the traditional “Rome-as-center” model of influence and instead seeks to classify the relationship between provincials and their conquerors as one of reciprocity. The
peripheries of the Roman Empire were a crossroads of influences; the fusion and combination of cultural elements intensified through networks of trade and transport, religious practices, civic self-representation, and imperial decree.

With objects drawn from the Gallery’s collection of Roman and Byzantine art, complemented by important loans from the Princeton University Art Museum, the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Roman in the Provinces aims to explore what “being Roman” meant among different groups and across the expanse of the empire. Concepts of identity—and the ways in which provincials asserted those identities—are explored through coinage, household objects, military accoutrements, and religious iconography, with particular focus on the provinces of the Eastern Mediterranean during and after the height of the Imperial era (first to sixth century A.D.).

“People tend to envision the Roman Empire through the imperial portrait busts, toga-clad statues, and Latin tombstones that fill many museums, or through the brick and marble amphitheaters, arches, forums, and baths of famous ancient cities,” says Gail L. Hoffman, Assistant Professor of Classical Studies at Boston College and co-curator of the exhibition. “Yet the range of material culture and languages used by inhabitants in this empire’s huge territorial expanse was much more varied. Archaeologists are only now beginning to explore fully the multicultural nature of its many provinces and to grapple with the numerous identities expressed through the objects that its millions of inhabitants used every day. Roman in the Provinces encourages visitors to expand their view of what it meant to be Roman and, in doing so, to deepen their understanding and appreciation of the accomplishments of this ancient society.”

Related Programs

Exhibition Tours
Friday, September 5, 1:30 pm
Lisa R. Brody, Associate Curator of Ancient Art

Members’ Preview
Thursday, August 21, 3:00 pm
Lisa R. Brody, Associate Curator of Ancient Art

Gallery Talks
Wednesday, September 17, 12:30 pm
Lisa R. Brody, Associate Curator of Ancient Art, and Carol Snow, Deputy Chief Conservator and the Alan J. Dworsky Senior Conservator of Objects
Friday, October 10, 1:30 pm
“Life Before Hairspray: The Art of Ancient Roman Hairdressing”
Janet Stevens

Family Program
Sunday, November 2, 3:00 pm
“Making Roman Mosaics”

Performance
Thursday, November 20, 5:30 pm
“Waters of Cyprus, Syria, and Egypt”: Poetry and the Roman Provinces

Exhibition Catalogue
Roman in the Provinces: Art on the Periphery of Empire is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, published by the McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College. This beautifully illustrated volume, edited by Lisa R. Brody and Gail L. Hoffman, presents new ways of thinking about the concept of “being Roman”—with a particular emphasis on the way people in the provinces and on the periphery of the empire reacted to the state of being a Roman subject. The book presents material that is both chronologically and geographically distant from imperial Rome, the better to characterize and understand local responses and identities within the provinces as they were expressed through material culture.

300 pages / 7 x 10 inches / 75 color illustrations and 125 halftones / Published by the McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, Distributed by the University of Chicago Press / 2014 / Price $45, Members $36

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Yale University Art Gallery
The Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest college art museum in the United States, was founded in 1832 when the patriot-artist John Trumbull gave more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then its collections have grown to more than 200,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present.

In addition to its world-renowned collections of American paintings and decorative arts, the Gallery is noted for outstanding collections of Greek and Roman art, including artifacts from the ancient Roman city of Dura-Europos; collections of early Italian paintings; the Société Anonyme Collection of 20th-century European and American art; modern and contemporary art and design; Asian art; African art; art of the ancient Americas; and Indo-Pacific art.
In December 2012, the Gallery completed a comprehensive expansion and renovation project which united its three buildings—the landmark Louis Kahn building (1953), the Old Yale Art Gallery building (1928), and Street Hall (1866)—into a cohesive whole with a rooftop addition by Ennead Architects (2012). The Gallery is both a collecting and an educational institution, and all activities are aimed at providing an invaluable resource and experience for Yale faculty, staff, and students, as well as for the general public.

General Information
The Yale University Art Gallery is located at 1111 Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10 am–5 pm; Thursday until 8 pm (September–June); and Saturday–Sunday, 11 am–5 pm. The Gallery is closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission is free and open to the public. For general information, please call 203.432.0600 or visit the website at www.artgallery.yale.edu.

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