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Renovating the Etruscan and Roman Galleries

What with a total replacement of its fire safety and security system and the imminent addition of the new Mainwaring wing, the Museum is a busy place these days. This makes us all the more pleased that the Mediterranean Section is adding to the creative confusion by implementing a major renovation of its Etruscan and Roman galleries. The current displays of Roman and Etruscan material were designed in the 1950s and are showing their age. Geared to the challenge, everyone from the section curators to the Museum's development officer are hard at work to meet the Fall 2002 opening date.

We are following the pattern established in the renovated Greek gallery, which looks at the ancient world thematically and treats its objects contextually rather than as just works of art. The Roman gallery will examine Daily Life, Death and Burial, Commerce, Religion, Diana's Sanctuary at Lake Nemi, and the site of Minturnae (dug by the Museum in the 1930s). The Etruscan hall will cover the Earliest Etruscans, Warriors and Weavers, the Etruscan Language, Daily Life, Religion, Architecture, Technology, and Commerce.

The specific strengths of the Roman collection lie in its glass, gems, coins, and various sculptures, particularly those from Nemi and Minturnae. The Etruscan collection, with its rich assortment of excavated pottery, stone sarcophagi, and bronzes, is regarded as one of the most important assemblages of Etruscan material in this country. Dr. Irene Romano, project manager, is conceptualizing an introductory unit for all three Classical galleries, as well as working with me on the Roman displays. The section's Senior Research Scientist, Dr. Ann Brownlee, has teamed up with Bryn Mawr's Dr. Jean Turfa to plan the Etruscan exhibits. MASCA's head, Dr. Stuart Fleming, is working on the glass. Among the various outside experts assisting us with the coins, gems, and bronzes are Drs. Jane Evans, Dietrich Berges, and P.G. Warden.

The project has already received an important planning grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The remaining costs for mounting these exhibits, which we hope will be met by a combination of foundation and corporation support and help from private donors, are projected to be around two million dollars—a substantial amount to be sure, but we are confident that the rewards in store for everyone will be even greater.

Donald White
Curator in Charge
Mediterranean Section

Be sure to visit the Museum's Web site: www.upenn.edu/museum