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The Euphronios Krater: Education, Stewardship, and Public Trust

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Abstract

Acquired in 1972, the Euphronios krater reigned as a masterpiece at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for nearly four decades. Its restitution to Italy in 2008 constituted a loss felt acutely by curators, the public, and the museum's educators. This essay explores dialogic interpretations of the krater's iconography developed in gallery programs led by the author as a route into questions of stewardship raised by restitution, examining how objects are restored to life by shared acts of attentive looking. The essay further considers convergent issues of deaccessioning and calls for the inclusion of museum educators' voices as advocates for the public trust in all decision making that affects museums' collections.

I

In 1972, The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired an ancient Greek vase that the museum pronounced the most beautiful of its kind in the world. Known as the Euphronios krater, the red-figure vase soon became a celebrated beacon for those who sought poetic repose in the ancient world, a favored port of entry for those who aspired to an experience of antiquity through its extant objects. Made by the potter Euxitheos and painted by the artist Euphronios, it is signed by both, and it is their masterpiece. An elaborate decorative program on the vase frames a mythological scene on one side and young men arming themselves for battle on the other. At the center sprawls the mortally wounded Sarpedon, lifted by Sleep and Death, and guided by Hermes, for transport to eternity. Of the Euphronios krater, Hoving (1972), then director of the museum, wrote that from the moment of its first public exhibition at the Metropolitan, "the histories of art" would "have to be rewritten. Majestic without pomp, poignant without a shred of false emotion, perfect without relying on mere precision, the great krater is one of those rarities" (p. 1). Bothmer (1972), Curator of Greek and Roman Art, went still further, writing that "surpassing in beauty and excellence any vase in the Museum's large collection…and may without exaggeration be considered the finest Greek vase there is" (p. 3).

Despite its immediate acclaim and warm embrace by the public, the great krater settled uneasily into the Metropolitan Museum's galleries. There were whispers about its uncertain provenance, regrets about disreputable dealers, and rumblings about the implausibility of its transportation in a shoebox. Hoving called it a "hot pot." The name stuck, and over the course of thirty-five years, initially hushed critiques of the acquisition grew steadily to a roar.

A protracted period of negotiation between Metropolitan Museum officials and Italian authorities over the ownership of this undocumented antiquity came to an end on January 14, 2008, when the Euphronios krater was quietly removed from the Metropolitan's galleries and sent to Italy. Along with other American museums, the Metropolitan had been accused of acquiring objects from dealers who trafficked in illegally excavated and smuggled artifacts, and in so doing, of violating an international agreement to stop and prevent such practices. Among the most sought-after and contested of these objects was the Euphronios krater. Upon its arrival in Rome, the krater received a "hero's welcome" (Povoledo, 2008) and immediately joined sixty-eight other artifacts in an exhibition titled *Nostoi: Capolavori Ritrovati* [Nostoi: Recovered Masterpieces], a display of objects that had made their way *from* and *back to* Italy in a similar fashion—*nostoi* being the plural of *nostos*, the ancient Greek word referring to an epic hero's homeward journey by sea or perhaps, more simply, a homecoming.

The Euphronios krater had become an immensely important commodity whose fate was now determined by a complicated nexus of governments, museums, archeologists, antiquities dealers, collectors, curators, ethicists, postcolonial theorists, and art historians, all of whom were very much invested in all that was at stake. The complex reasons behind Italy's demand for the krater's return essentially boiled down to one argument viewed from two complementary perspectives: the purely archeological, which focused on the origins of antiquities, and the legal/ethical, which focused on their destinations. Archaeologists explained that the acquisition by museums and private collectors of undocumented antiquities not only sustains the illegal looting of archeological sites per se, but that this process inevitably destroys invaluable information specific to each artifact's archeological context and hence essential to the understanding of excavated ancient objects. The Euphronios krater is a case in point. It was made in Athens or nearby in Attica circa 515 BC, when calyx kraters like this one were used for mixing wine and water. The images painted on such vessels served as a source of inspiration for the discursive practices of the drinking parties known as symposia, in which men, both young and old, gathered together to discuss politics and philosophy, to converse and recite poetry.

Greek authorities, preoccupied with their long campaign for the return of the Parthenon/Elgin marbles, did not claim the krater. The Italians, however, did, basing their claim on the fact that the krater was believed to have been illegally dug up in Italy. To this day, scholars do not know exactly how such a masterwork might have traveled from Athens to Italy, or how it had functioned in Etruscan life. Regarding the krater's origins, it is generally believed that the vase was looted by tomb robbers from the elegiac tombs known as the Necropoli Etrusca della Banditaccia necropolis outside Cerveteri, and that it then passed through the hands of several intermediaries before the Metropolitan acquired it in 1972 (Spivey, 2018). Had proper archeological excavation of the Euphronios krater been possible, its find spot might have provided evidence that it had continued to serve its original function in its new home in Etruria, or rather that the vase had been adapted, reimagined for new purposes and places and people. The krater's looting had foreclosed, possibly forever, the hope of addressing these and many other crucial questions. This is precisely the promise of a find spot: Proper excavation provides information otherwise lost.

The second argument advanced in favor of the Euphronios krater's return to Italy was legal and ethical. The Metropolitan Museum's acquisition of the object in 1972 had violated a recently signed international accord (which would not however be fully ratified until 1986) intended to put a stop to the trafficking of stolen antiquities: the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (UNESCO, 1970), according to which participating countries agreed to cooperate not only to counter the illicit trade in antiquities but to work for the "return and restitution of cultural property" (UNESCO, n.d.). Any acquisition by a cultural institution of looted artifacts would henceforth be considered precisely as contributing to the destruction of valuable contextual information. All cultural institutions, it was agreed, must set the highest ethical standards in their acquisitions process. Pressed to honor this agreement with regard to the krater, the Metropolitan reluctantly agreed, tersely describing the conclusion of negotiations with the Italian authorities as a "transfer of title" in a press release that also quoted Philippe de Montebello, the museum's director, as commenting that the Metropolitan was motivated by "a recognition of its institutional responsibility" (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006).[1]

By January 19, 2008, the Euphronios krater was in Rome, on display first for an exhibition provocatively entitled *Nostoi* at the Palazzo del Quirinale, as mentioned before, then at the Palazzo Poli, and soon at the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia, Italy's National Museum for Etruscan Art. In the fall of 2008, I went to see it there. Remembering the position that the krater had occupied with such power in the bustling galleries of the Metropolitan Museum for so many years, I was surprised by its installation at the Villa Guilia. The krater was hard to find, surrounded by a multitude of red-figure vases in a museum largely empty of visitors. Today the Euphronios krater is in Cerveteri, in the collection of the modest Museo Archeologico Cerite, where it is displayed amid hundreds of artifacts and seen by few visitors. In its most recent public appearance, from May to July of 2019, the krater was part of the exhibition *L'Arte di Salvare l'Arte. Frammenti di Storia d'Italia* [The Art of Saving Art: Fragments of Italian History] at the Quiranale, which celebrated the anniversary of the founding of a special unit of the carabinieri, the Italian federal paramilitary police, part of whose mission it is to preserve the country's patrimony by seeking out stolen artworks and restoring them to the state (Palazzo Quirinale, 2019).[2] Again I went to see the krater, enticed by the rare chance to see it in the beautiful setting of the Quirinale. And again, I was surprised to see its reclusive existence. Few were able to see it, as visitation was carefully monitored and restricted through limited online ticketing.

What was gained by the Italians was an almost unbearable loss to the Metropolitan Museum, especially to the director and to the museum's Greek and Roman curators. Yet the loss was felt just as acutely by the Metropolitan's educators and public audiences. The Euphronios krater had shone brightly in the galleries and starred in education programs for some thirty-five years, introducing generations of students to the worlds of ancient Greece and Rome, to their various arts and epic stories. Year after year, as students gathered around this vase, the story of Sarpedon time and again proved relevant to them all, whether war was then raging in Vietnam, in the Cambodian killing fields, in Rwanda, in Afghanistan, in Iraq, or in the streets of our American cities. What follows is an account of the close-looking inspired by the pictorial program of the krater, synthesized from the scores of gallery programs for groups of student and adult visitors that I led as a museum educator, and of the dialogue that arose around and about a marvelous artwork. This essay as such constitutes a record of the reception of the Euphronios krater by a late twentieth and early twenty-first century public, a nuanced and fine reading made possible by education programs in the Greek and Roman galleries of the Metropolitan. Each encounter typically lasted an hour.

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[1] De Montebello's full quote as cited in the press release is included in the Appendix.

[2] Information about the exhibition (in Italian only), including photographs and video, is still available on the Quirinale's website (see References).

II

> Looking at Greek vases is a contemplative pursuit, comparable perhaps to fishing or gardening. It generously repays a viewer who is keenly attentive to detail, who is willing to linger over wiry lines that define a palmette or pleated drapery or to consider the effect of the placement of a handle. (Mertens, 2010, ii)

Every day for thirty-five years, as groups of students and visitors gathered around the Euphronios krater at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, engaged in close looking and contemplative study, extraordinary dialogues concerning life and death, mortality and immortality, and war and peace arose around and about this marvelous vessel.

Day after day, we press in, we walk around, we look closely. Imagine that you join us. Standing eighteen inches tall and stretching nearly twenty-two inches in diameter, the krater is a magisterial presence in the galleries. You notice the vase's distinctive form, the potent red figures against fields of glossy black, the theatrical structuring of the two main scenes. The vase calls out to you. You try to understand what each figure is doing; you try to puzzle out the characters' names, written in Greek beside each one. Few of us have heard of the fallen hero depicted, Sarpedon; fewer still recognize the name of the artists, Euxitheos and Euphronios.

Through our attentive looking, you discover exquisite interrelations among shape, ornament, and narrative. Standing back, you perceive in the vase a harmonic whole. A slender base rises miraculously to fullness of form, swelling to push the story out toward the viewer's eye. Spectacular figuration and minute details jump into view and compel your gaze to move around the vase and among the figures, revealing their relations, showing us where to look, what to question. The pictorial band, or picture field, wraps around the widest part of the body of the vase, and becomes a stage for the figures, quite appropriately called actors, who—against a field of deep black, defined at top and bottom by exuberant bands of decoration—emerge to recount for you an ancient tale. The krater's large handles, which might be construed as merely functional features that interrupt the narrative, in effect create intermissions between the two main scenes, obverse and reverse, and which we feel tempted to call acts one and two. One of the pleasures offered by this vase lies in discerning the interrelations of obverse and reverse to one another and their relation to the shape of the whole. Lush decorative configurations are partially hidden behind the handles, dividing but also connecting the two scenes, asking the viewer who is compelled to walk around the vase to pass slowly through fields of extravagant palmettes and searching spirals.

The bold figures again catch your eye. You notice that each bears a name. Like anime illustrators and graphic novelists today, Euphronios leaves no uncertainty as to his protagonists' identities. You begin to decipher the names. On the obverse, Sarpedon's name runs under his left arm, in poignant counterpoint to the blood streaming from his many wounds. The name of the divine messenger Hermes is inscribed over his left shoulder, floating a bit like a banderole behind his herald's wand, the *kerykeion*. Sleep's name, Hypnos, seems to fall forward from his face unbidden, while Death's name, Thanatos, appears to spring from his lips, as if he were announcing his own arrival. You note that the latter's name is written in reverse, from right to left—retrograde, drawing emphasis. Decorative features of the krater that connect the two scenes visually lead us to intense consideration of just how we are to connect the *content* of the two scenes, one clearly mythological, the other apparently in the mortal realm. We sometimes consider the following insight from Schein (1984), on the battles recounted in the *Iliad*: "War is the medium of human existence and achievement," he writes, "bravery and excellence in battle win honor and glory and thus endows life with meaning" (p. 68).

On the krater's reverse, the beardless young men we see are also all named, though it quickly becomes clear that they are ordinary mortals, not famous heroes or gods. On the far left is Hyperochos, holding a short sword and pulling at a ribbon around his head—a touching allusion perhaps, we speculate, to a victory he hopes one day to win. Reading from left to right, as the composition invites, even urges us to do, the next youth is Hippsos, putting on his greaves, or shin-protecting armor. Next, already fully armed, is Medon. Then comes Akastos, picking up his shield, his name also written in retrograde. The fifth figure is Axippos (spelled Achsippos, again in retrograde). Both Medon and Axippos, in their standing profile stances, facing to our right and showing us the outer surface of their shields, appear to mirror the sentinel-like figure on the right side of the Sarpedon scene, while the matching sentinel to Sarpedon's left reveals the *inner* surface of his shield—a note of vulnerability, perhaps? In addition to the names, we notice an inscription, like a banner headline, scrolling above all the figures on both sides of the vase: *Leagros kalos*, "He was a good/beautiful young man." Perhaps this inscription, understood as "Leagros is fair," refers to a specific individual. But if understood as "He was a good *and* beautiful young man," it suggests perhaps that a beautiful and noble young person is always present, and within us all. We find ourselves included in the scene.

We identify the Sarpedon scene's likely source in the *Iliad* and realize that it would be a mistake to read the image simply as a mere illustration of the epic poem. The story is the catalyst, which precipitates and percolates allusions to the text. In this spirit, noting that the poem is neither necessarily constraining or enabling—to us or to the artist Euphronios—we read aloud the passage from the *Iliad* that tells one of the most vivid and moving tales in the epic. In combat on the battlefield outside Troy's walls, Sarpedon launches his spear and misses. Achilles's companion, Patroclus, throws next:

> He struck him right where the midriff packs the pounding heart
> and down Sarpedon fell as an oak or white poplar falls
> or towering pine that shipwrights up on a mountain
> hew down with whetted axes for sturdy ship timber—
> so he stretched in front of his team and chariot,
> sprawled and roaring, clawing the bloody dust. (Fagles, 1990, 16.569–74)[3]

With his dying breath, Sarpedon cries out to Glaucos, his beloved companion, urging him to rally the Lycian captains and their troops to prevent the Greeks from desecrating his body by stripping him of his armor. But Sarpedon's voice falters as we read:

> Death cut him short.
> The end closed in around him, swirling down his eyes,
> Choking off his breath. (Fagles, 1990, 16.592–94)

You draw closer now, look more closely, seeking correspondences to and departures from Homer's account. We see that Euphronios depicts precisely the moment just after Sleep and Death have arrived and begun to fulfill Zeus's instructions to lift Sarpedon and bear him away from the battlefield. You see the black ground of the vase—the black that places us in a celestial night, the eternal darkness, the fog of war in which battles always unfold. Death indeed cuts Sarpedon short: Enormous and godly, he stretches across the entire front of the vase, suspended between his divine escorts. His enemies have almost entirely stripped him of his armor, and only his greaves remain. His head is turned toward the earth, teeth clenched, as death is "choking off his breath." His wiry red lion's mane of hair is rippling, and red blood gushes from his wounds, indicating he lives for yet a moment. Even the smallest details capture our attention. Sarpedon's right fingertips gracefully caress the earth, as if to remember the ground he is leaving, while the fingers of his left hand touch or perhaps even pinch the toes of Death. His left foot rests upon Sleep's right foot, as with his last remaining bit of strength, we think, Sarpedon strives to push his body up, while his right foot dangles as if searching for one last toehold. The hero's exceptionally powerful, richly muscled torso enraptures us, making us feel this moment of his loss all the more poignantly, as if we were ourselves his companions in arms. Your gaze returns to his drooping head, where small tufts of side whiskers poignantly remind us of his early manhood—a life cut short. Sarpedon's delicate eyelids seem to flicker one last time as we look.

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[3] All quotations from the *Iliad* are from the translation by Robert Fagles (1990), which was the text generally used by the Met's Education Department throughout the period when the krater was on view in the museum.

You recognize Hermes, boldly occupying center stage, from his distinctive attributes—his winged cap, his winged footwear, and his herald's wand. We think however that Hermes appears here not as divine messenger but in his role as psychopomp, the conductor of souls who accompanies the deceased to the underworld, and occasionally brings them back as well, restoring to the universe the circulation of souls. He has just arrived to escort the body of Sarpedon. Hermes is moving fast—perhaps racing at breakneck speed. His feet are spread apart in midstride, while the small ankle wings attached to his sandal boots aid his efforts not by propelling him but by *pulling* his feet forward to the appointed destination, to our right. The forward striding foot of Hermes is whimsically defined with upturned toes, and tiny buttons secure his boots. The fabric of the god's cloak, or *himation*, is sent rippling backward to our left by his racing run to the right. At the same time, he twists his entire torso backward in a strange stance commensurate with his supernatural task, looking back, raising his right hand in an urgent gesture—an admonition, a warning, or possibly a benediction? Hermes seems to urge Sleep to greater haste or greater care, as if to say, *Make haste, take care, we must not fail!*

Hermes's gesture draws your attention to Sarpedon's supernatural escorts, lifting his body from the battlefield. Euphronios has depicted the twin brothers Sleep and Death as subtly different. Both have wings attached at the shoulder and spreading open wide behind them—newly alighted? And/or ready to take off? —and both wear large helmets tilted back on their heads. But Sleep wears a plain tunic with a patterned belt, while Death wears an elaborately decorated tunic, made of some kind of mesh. Sleep alone appears to be armed: We see the ends of a short sword projecting in front of and behind his left hip. Yet Death seems much the fiercer of the two. You note the pronounced differences between the two figures' gazes and postures. Sleep's downward-tilting gaze suggests a hint of sorrow in his expression. Even his beard seems a bit less sharply pointed than Death's. In contrast, Death's steely, wide-eyed gaze, framed by thick and flaring eyelashes, is sharp, unclouded by grief. He stares down unseen enemies who are "ablaze for battle" and striving to reach Sarpedon in order to "seize his body, mutilate him, shame him, tear his gear from his back" (16.650–55). Sleep struggles with his task, with Sarpedon's sheer weight; visible strain shows in the god's massive upper back. Moreover, the curving volume of the vase heightens the illusion that Sleep has just sprinted into the scene, perhaps a bit late to his task. You note with astonishment that Sleep's right hand is losing its grip on Sarpedon's left thigh. By contrast, Death's grip on the hero's left underarm is firm as he expertly performs his task from a powerful crouch. The curve of the vase gives Death a distinct advantage—the pull of momentum is in his favor. Has there been a tug of war between Sleep and Death? Is this, you wonder, what it means to die, that soothing Sleep loses his grip and surrenders our human bodies to irrevocable Death?

You turn your attention once more to the fallen hero. Sarpedon's blood is flowing freely, underscoring how close he is to death. But his blood does not fall as it should, that is, as gravity would have it, straight down. Instead, it rakes diagonally to the left, and we realize that the fallen warrior is being not simply lifted but swept away swiftly to the right with urgency and speed. In this moment he hovers, suspended, between life and death. *Could Sleep have saved Sarpedon from Death? But no,* Hermes seems to say in response, *Sleep, you cannot keep him, you must let him go!* We step back to consider again the overall composition, the dying Sarpedon, seeing anew how every figure is interlocked with another, each actor overlapping another at least slightly, hence linked and bound by fate. The deathless gods have spoken. The drama is a scramble—and an elegy.

The krater is round, of course, and our experience necessarily takes on a certain performative aspect as we circle it slowly, pulled around its circumference and into its narrative. Wherever we stand, we each see something slightly different from the person next to us, because of the krater's infinite curving. One moment comes into focus as another disappears. We experience a physical undertow, an embodied call for movement and exploration, as we adjust each new observation to the one just discovered. And as we sort out the complex narrative, one scene at a time is before the eye, the other a remembrance but a few moments old. So, through eye, motion, and memory, the front and the back of the vase continuously inform each other, interrogate each other, never allowing us to forget that they live in the same pictorial continuum, with intermissions in between: an endless narrative drama. We desire to linger, and yet experience the urge to speed along with Hermes and the winged gods. The play is performed as long as we participate.

Back to the action. One visitor feels called to tell the young warriors on the reverse, *Stop! Don't go! You will die on the battlefield!* Sarpedon's pivotal speech to his companion, Glaucus, comes to us in this moment:

> Ah my friend, if you and I could escape this fray
> And live forever, never a trace of age, immortal,
> I would never fight on the front lines again
> Or command you to the field where men win fame.

> But now, as it is, the fates of death await
> Thousands poised to strike, and not a man alive
> Can flee them or escape—so in we go for attack!
> Give our enemy glory or win it for ourselves! (Fagles, 1990, 12.374–81)

You turn now to study in detail the reverse of the krater and the arming scene it depicts. The composition is not symmetrically arranged; at first glance it appears a rather untidy assemblage of young men—as if, says someone next to you, they have shown up one at a time. Each is arming himself, preparing for battle. As you look, the youths seem to ascend and then climb over the small hilltop created by the shield lying on the ground, then speed up as if to pile out onto the battlefield. Or perhaps the young men on either side of the central shield-bearing soldier are the same man seen in a sequential action? You notice that one looks as if he is about to flip up his shield, in same way a friend of yours might flip her skateboard as she gets ready to jump into action! The pace of our conversation picks up. Our hearts quicken. A spear is tossed and grasped—the battle is soon to begin. As with soldiers everywhere preparing for battle, each is alone in his thoughts and preparations and is inexorably swept into the fray.

As these soldiers outfit themselves with arms and armor, meditations on death and different deaths cannot not be far away, neither for these long-ago warriors nor for you now whose conversation is sparked by this artwork. In the view of the ancient Greeks, there were several different ways to die on the battlefield. An undistinguished death in battle is an anonymous slide into darkness. But a heroic death is celebrated and raises mortals to enviable fame and immortal status. As we circle around the vase, we see the arming of men, the hero's death, then again, the brave arming of men, then again, the glorious hero's death…and so on, endlessly.

Sarpedon has been caught up in a long and terrible battle. Dying as we look, our not-yet-dead and beloved hero is lifted from the gory battlefield wearing only his greaves, blood streaming from his wounds. Every warrior in ancient Greece feared that his body might be left on the battlefield and desecrated by the enemy. The prospect of his body "being mangled on the battlefield by the enemy and his dogs," writes the classical scholar and archaeologist Vermeule (1979), "stirs up soldiers even more than the prospect of death for themselves" (p. 112). Thus has Sarpedon cried out to Glaucus, "'You'll hang your head in shame—every day of your life—if the Argives strip my armor'" (16.588), and Glaucus in turn warns the Lydians that they will "'Cringe with shame at the thought they'll strip his gear and maim his corpse" (16.638–9) before he pleads with Apollo, "lend me power in battle…to save my comrade's corpse myself (16.619). Hearing his companion's cry, Glaucos pleads with Apollo to intercede. Zeus, who has delighted in the carnage, is reluctant to see the fighting end. Yet when Sarpedon's body comes perilously close to humiliating mutilation at the hands of his enemies, Zeus, as Sarpedon's father, finally intervenes, instructing Apollo to rescue his son's body from the field:

> Then send him on his way with the wind-swift escorts,
> twin brothers Sleep and Death, who with all good speed
> will set him down in the broad green land of Lycia.
> There his brothers and countrymen will bury the prince with full royal rites. (Fagles, 1990, 16.784–88)

You return yet again to the correspondence between the two scenes, obverse and reverse, a relation both simple and increasingly complex. In the arming scene, young men put on armor; they are soon to take their chances in battle. As you discover, perhaps the young warriors have just heard Sarpedon's plea for the rescue of his body. Or that perhaps all three represent Sarpedon in his own youth. Or perhaps you come back to our shared first thought: Wars never end, soldiers put on and take off their armor, one battle ends, only to prepare for the next. From the meditative putting on of armor to savage rampage, we see the greaves provide a motif of continuity, from front to back and back to front, as we circle the vase. The arming soldiers have put on their greaves; Sarpedon has lost all his armor *but* his greaves. As you look, he is being rescued from an ignominious death on the battlefield, but barely in time. In this inexorable continuum, each scene foreshadows the next, again and again.

For its original audience of men drinking wine and conversing at a symposium, "The krater showed an exemplary way to live," suggests Spivey (2018). "It was exemplary, too, of how to die" (p. 133). For us, the vase offers a tragic vision of an unending continuum: the living and the dying, the dying and the living, hope and fear intertwining, the boundary between war and peace ever fluctuating. You experience in your imagination the hopes of the arming men, Sarpedon's terror. But you also come to understand how a glorious death grants immortality. For the ancient Greeks, a hero lives beyond death in human memory by virtue of his glory. As you contemplate the story of Sarpedon, he indeed lives, raised to the immortal spheres of art and song. As long as you witness Sarpedon's last moments, he is alive.

You pause, not quite believing your eyes. Hermes races into view again! His urgent stride, intent gaze, twisting torso, and nod of the head speed this image into eternity. On the krater, he props up Sarpedon's body, which is displayed frontally, flat to the viewer, as if to allow us to witness a second of stillness, a majestic and solemn vision of a fallen hero as he is rescued and swept away by his "wind-swift escorts." Sarpedon is flattened to our vision, as it were, by Euphronios so that Sarpedon might appear to us now in the present. As divine courier, Hermes bears messages from the gods, which demand their—and your—interpretation. But with his sudden reappearance, you remember to be cautious. Hermes is a character of complication, given his propensity for mischief, creativity, and play, his power to cause change, and his gift for predicting the future. The messages Hermes brings from the gods can be uncertain in meaning and open to divinatory readings. Hermes is a sly one. Perhaps Hermes nods not so much to the deity Sleep as he does to us: *You figure it out*, he says.

III

Museums exist for and because of objects and for the public that loves these objects. The work of museum educators is, pure and simple, to bring art and people together. We believe in the power of artworks, we believe in their *thingness*, we believe in their capacities to open new worlds for us. We believe in a museum pedagogy that decenters the single authoritative voice and welcomes the voices of many. After endless pandemic months of viewing and teaching artworks online, we know more than ever that virtual experience is a frail substitute for direct experience of the intrinsic power of objects to cajole, bewitch, uplift, expand, extend, and transform us. Relegated to the internet, the experience of history and its objects recedes to a distant shore.

The Euphronios krater, acquired in public trust, and expressly for the enlightenment and pleasures of the public, disappeared from the galleries of the Metropolitan Museum. Other objects in other institutions, large and small, have departed, too, sometimes for reasons of restitution but increasingly for reasons of deaccessioning as well. Although vastly different purposes underlie these two processes, and although they may arise from very different concerns, the result of restitution or deaccessioning for the public is always the same: The artwork is no longer on view, no longer in the public domain of the museum.

Pandemic-driven financial woes in particular are leading more museums to deaccession (see Kazakina, 2021). Sometimes the very survival of the institution is claimed to be at stake. Sometimes deaccessioning is an ad hoc substitute for reformed fiscal responsibility. Sometimes the proceeds legitimately refocus the institution’s mission and support purchases of works to enhance its core collections.

The debates concerning both restitution and deaccessioning have to date remained largely within the realm of elite discourse, among directors and donors, boards and legal counsel. Absent from the discussion are the voices of the public. Should the public have a say in museum responsibilities? Had the Metropolitan asked New Yorkers, most would likely have responded with a resounding “keep the krater.” Yet the public was not consulted. In this era devoted to diversity and inclusion, equity and access, it seems reasonable to propose that the very people for whom artworks are acquired should have a say in whether the artworks stay or go. As it stands now, the museum’s devoted public, the communities of visitors and students that it exists to serve, and the museum educators who teach them, have no say in such deliberations.

In our close reading of the Euphronios krater at the Metropolitan, we used knowledge of our world to understand the past; and equally, we looked to ancient objects to help us to understand ourselves and the world we live in today. Such a two-way search for meaning creates precisely the zone in which we ask artworks to live: in our deepest questions, the questions we most urgently need to ask. We need to know about honor and glory and death and dying. We need the Euphronios krater to think about why we wage war and ask if we will ever create and know peace. We need to be swept away, captivated by an expanding sense of the past. We want to be ushered into the artwork's commanding presence, startled into awareness and awakened to ourselves as we examine its capacious beauty. And so we ask artworks to live with us where we can directly experience and interpret them. Hermes arrives, and we receive the message he bears: interpretation gives life. Through deep looking and dialogue, we bring the artwork back from the realm of the dead in the past and restore it to life in the present.

While the Euphronios krater will be seen and appreciated by the citizens of Italy and the tourists who find their way to its new home in Cerveteri, it will no longer be part of the experience of the five million people who visit the Metropolitan in a given year, nor of the hundreds of thousands of students who visit through the museum's education programs. Similarly—to choose just a few other significant examples—visitors and students will no longer be able to see an acclaimed and historically significant work by Cranach at the Brooklyn Museum; at the Newark Museum, they will no longer be able to experience Georgia O'Keefe's splendid *Green Oak Leaves*; and at the Everson Museum, they have lost the opportunity to come face to face with an iconic Jackson Pollock.

As advocates for the public and as educators striving to help people make sense of civilization and themselves, we can only witness these disappearances of beloved objects as irreparable losses to our public. Our plea is to find a way to build museums of inclusion, to ensure access to the arts for everyone. A truly inclusive museum should, *must*, include the voices of the public and their advocates, the educators, in the very difficult decisions involved in restitution and deaccessioning. For it is on behalf of the public that these institutions claim their moral and civic responsibility, their very reason for being. While there are no obvious solutions to an immensely complicated issue, this necessary inclusion and participation in what stays and what goes would, I believe, lead to progressive and much-needed new models for education, stewardship, and public trust.

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About the Author

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Appendix

Regarding restitution, Philippe de Montebello's quote in the press release regarding the final terms for the krater's repatriation to Italy (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006) is worth reading in full:

> It is with a recognition of its institutional responsibility—coupled with the highest hopes for continued, mutually beneficial relationships with our many colleagues in Italy—that the Metropolitan has concluded these negotiations, which affirm a solution that it first proposed in Rome in November. This is the appropriate solution to a complex problem, which redresses past improprieties in the acquisitions process through a highly equitable arrangement. The Met is particularly gratified that, through this agreement, its millions of annual visitors will continue to see comparably great works of ancient art on long-term loan from Italy to this institution.

Regarding deaccessioning, it is important to note that in some instances, deaccessioned artworks remain available to public view. For example, the year before the Euphronios krater left the galleries of the Metropolitan, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, in Buffalo, New York, began deaccessioning its antiquities, not for the sake of restitution but in order to realign the collections more closely with its central and historic mission to collect modern and contemporary artworks. The sale of numerous significant objects in the museum's collections was accomplished through a series of auctions at Sotheby's, the first of which took place in March 2007 and the most recent in February 2021. Several of the ancient works found their way into public museums, notably a Shang dynasty bronze, purchased by the Asian Art Museum; a statue of Shiva, purchased by the Cleveland Museum of Art; and the famed bronze *Artemis and the Stag*, purchased by a private collector and now on long-term loan to the Metropolitan Museum. Although the decision to deaccession each work was difficult at the time, as then Director Louis Grachos has told me, these were especially happy outcomes. Of *Artemis and the Stag* in particular, he said that while the sculpture had been "seldom on view at the Albright Knox, now great numbers of people see it every day, placed as it is in the very center of the Leon Levy and Shelby White Court of the Met's Greek and Roman galleries." He added, "We're glad the world will get the opportunity to see these important artworks, be informed by the scholarship that is possible in these institutions, and by the education programs that are so integral to these great museums" (personal communications, Dec. 2021). (For details of the auction of *Artemis and the Stag* at Sotheby's, see Sotheby's, 2007, and Forbes, 2007.)

Part II of this essay constitutes a record of the reception of this masterwork by members of the public who participated in education programs at the Met, collectively producing nuanced and fine readings of its iconography through their dialogical engagement. The interpretations detailed here include observations, questions, and insights offered in the course of gallery conversations with groups of both adult and student visitors from 1985 through 2008. Each session typically lasted an hour or more in the Metropolitan's Greek and Roman Art galleries. Throughout this period, the krater was considered by curators, educators, and the public to be one of the museum's primary portals to the ancient world, and as such it was featured in highlights tours, tours of the Greek and Roman galleries, school and after-school programs for students, and weekend programs for both young and adult visitors.

I often found that high school students were especially permeable to the krater and exceptionally eloquent in their responses to it. Nik Velasquez, a New York City high school student in my afterschool program at the Metropolitan in 2000–2001, wrote to me recently as follows, remembering his introduction to the ancient world through this object:

> With you I learned that lips may have drunk wine from this krater. Before I knew wine! I learned that this krater was dedicated to someone. That a narrative encircled it. I remember we moved around it to take in that narrative. We watched [*sic*] into a glass cube, the black krater inside, upon which terracotta-colored people lived and died. Deities present. Ceremoniously taking the body away. Names were written beside figures. Hermes was there. Bright white light filled the atrium where we were. I remember being a boy then, standing and listening to what the others saw in the narrative. Now they are fragmented [i.e., dispersed]. Different worldviews came together. We all asked why the figures looked naked when they were also clothed; we saw shin guards. My early impressions of the Met were formed by the Greek and Roman collection.

For insight into the pedagogical principles that produced this account, please see Burnham and Kai-Kee (2011).

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