

SHOWCASE **A**

LNS 1776 M No. 1

This statue of a **Sabaeen leader** belongs to the Hellenistic tradition, with an undecorated corselet; the man wears a cloak (*chlamys*), which would usually have been secured on the right shoulder with a brooch.

The right arm is raised and reaches forward, with the hand half-open and the palm facing upwards. The left hand is closed in a fist and the position of the fingers suggests that the armoured figure held a cylindrical object, now lost (sceptre, sword, scroll, curved staff (*lituus*), chart, thunderbolt, or shield).

In terms of its original positioning, it is safe to assume that this statue was placed on a stone plinth or bronze base, on which a dedication was almost certainly carved or engraved.

Honorary statues, including armoured images, portraying leaders, generals, or princes whose special heroic and moral virtues were valued by their community, were displayed in public spaces – perhaps the square in front the prince's own palace. If the statue formed part of a group, it might have been placed in a temple courtyard - continuing the ancient tradition of donating bronze statues to temples.

SHOWCASE **B**

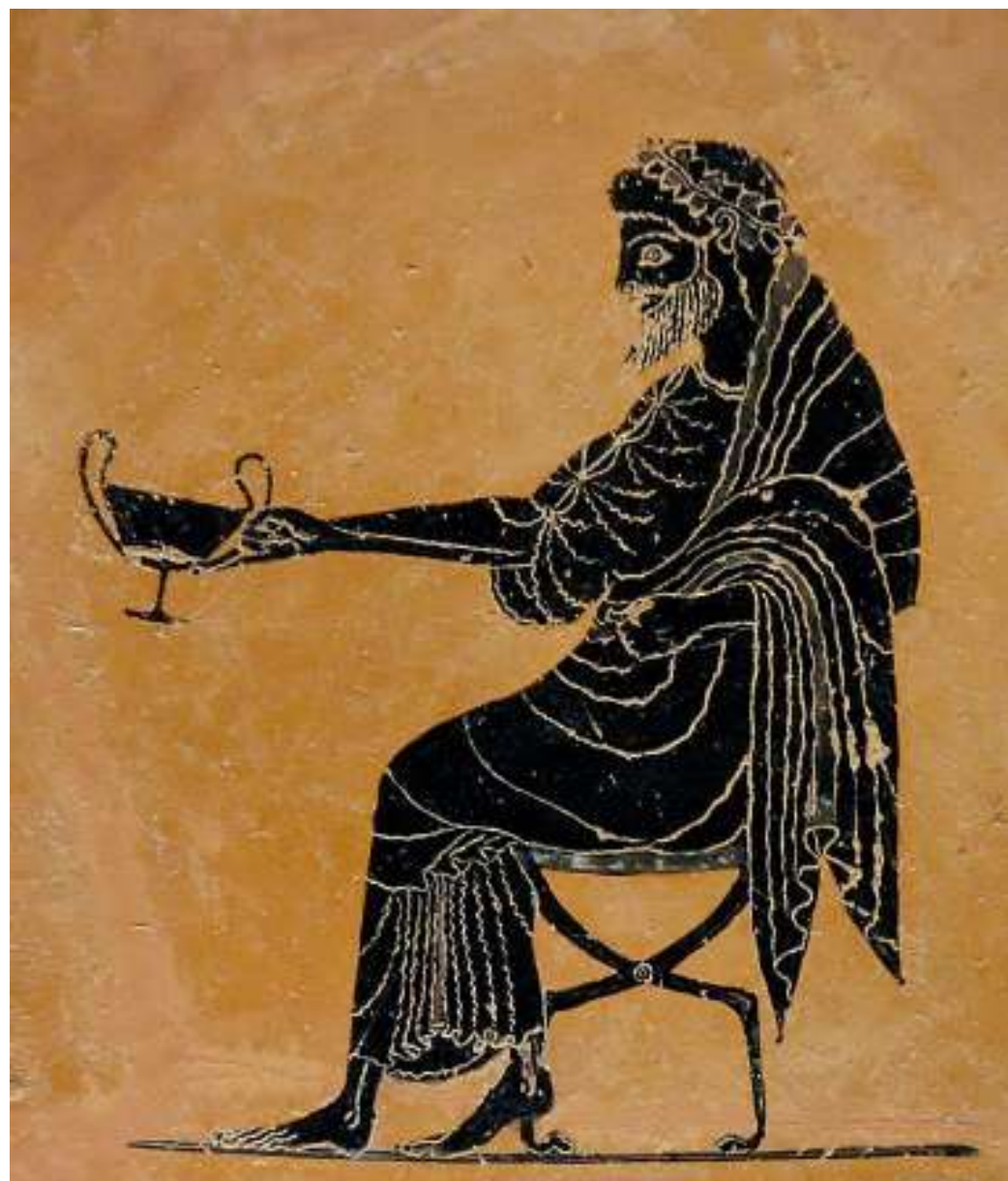
LNS 5068 J a-b No. 2

This type of gold **earrings**, shaped like a cornucopia and decorated with animal heads, originated in Greece around the end of the 4th century BCE and continued until the 1st century CE. The style of the animal heads is markedly Achaemenid and demonstrates that the origin is from ancient Persia. Several such examples of earrings manufactured in the shape of a '**cornucopia**' with a collar of granules exist in silver, found in South Arabian funerary contexts dating to the 1st century CE.

Cornucopia comes from the Latin *cornu copiae*, which translates literally as 'horn of plenty.' The cornucopia in Greek, and then Roman mythology, was a curved, hollow goat's horn shaped receptacle that is overflowing especially with fruits and vegetables and that is used as a symbol of abundance. It was often depicted as a symbolic accessory carried by gods like Zeus, and goddesses like Fortuna, and Demeter (Roman Ceres).

LNS 5008 J No. 3

In Greek mythology **Dionysus**, called Bacchus by the Romans, originally was a god of the fertility of nature, associated with wild and ecstatic religious rites. He was depicted as either an older, bearded god or an effeminate, long-haired youth. He was usually accompanied by a troop of Satyrs and Maenads (wild male and female devotees). The most distinctive symbol of Dionysus is the *thyrsus*, a pine-cone tipped staff. His other symbols are a drinking-cup (*kantharos*), a wreath of ivy-leaves, grapevines, and a panther.



Seated Dionysos holding out a kantharos, detail (ca. 520-500 BCE).
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Detail from inv. no. 1837,0609.31



Dionysos, with a thyrsus, riding a panther, Greek mosaic from Pella (Greece, 4th BCE),
© Archaeological Museum of Pella

LNS 5042 J a-b No. 5

Syro-Roman in style, this pair of bracelets may have been imported from Syria. They are probably from Palmyra, made for a Himyarite aristocratic woman.

Each **bracelet** is made up of two halves joined together by two vertical hinges. The upper register is decorated with two side-by-side winged griffins. The middle register shows a female head with a decoration on her head, probably ears of corn or flowers as a crown. These attributes recall the iconography of the goddess Isis-Fortuna. In the lower register are two lions crouched and facing each other, ridden by winged cherubs.

The bracelets are enriched by a polychrome style using coloured, round and drop-shaped stones, arranged between the figures in relief. Similar decorated band bracelets are often depicted on female funerary reliefs from Palmyra, starting from the 2nd century CE.

SHOWCASE C

LNS 1352 M a-b No. 6

The decoration of these **bowls** consists of a rosette in the centre of the base, with a corolla of six internal and eleven external petals, from which radiate scrolling floral vines issuing pomegranates and leaves. Bowls with external floral decoration like these in The al-Sabah Collection had their origin in Macedonian decorative art (4th century BCE), but became popular mostly in the 2nd century BCE. Similar bowls were made in faience, glass, gold and bronze, as well as in silver.

The dedication, which refers to a Himyarite prince named Laḥay‘athat ibn Sumhūsami‘, and the graphic style of the inscription date the bowls to the end of the 1st century CE.

Yuwallid, Na`d and their son Asad banū Aydan have deposited with the permission of their lord Laḥay‘athat ibn Sumhūsami‘

This is a customary way to list members of a family: beginning with members of the same generation and continuing with members of the next generation.

The bowls may have been found in the princely palace. It was probably in Baynūn.

LNS 1695 M a-c No. 9

These elegant small containers in precious metal may have been used for cosmetics, powders or balms intended for the care of the body. Labu‘ may be identified with the woman who owned the mirror (LNS 1686 M, No. 18) and the bowl (LNS 1771 M, No. 13) both in The al-Sabah Collection and included in this exhibition.

This type of fluted decoration has long tradition, as it first appears in eastern goldsmiths’ work of the 3rd century BCE. The sixteen-petalled rosette on the lid was commonly used from the 1st century BCE.

The globular box could have been imported from one of the neighbouring countries that were destinations on the South Arabian trade routes. It may, perhaps, have been used as the model for the other small boxes made in local workshops.

SHOWCASE **D**

LNS 1696 M
No. 15

This is a very rare small silver bottle (Latin *unguentarium*), most likely used to contain perfumed oils, ointments, or balsam. The oldest models were made of cast glass in Alexandria, Egypt and spread throughout the Mediterranean basin.

Around the 1st century CE in Syria, they were mostly made of transparent blown glass or ceramics, with ever smaller shapes and sizes, to be transported more easily. The mass production of Roman blown-glass *unguentaria* were distributed throughout the Mediterranean region of the Roman Empire. Roman glass *unguentaria* have been found even in South Arabian tombs.

SHOWCASE **E**

LNS 1646 M
No. 16

This **cuirass** (Latin *lorica*) is a Hellenistic type of an undecorated corselet. The L-shaped shoulder guards (*epomides*) with rounded edges served to secure the cuirass more safely, by means of two studs for laces. The cuirass has a semi-circular lower edge. A first layer of shorter leather or fabric lapets (*pteryges*) protects the pelvis, and a second layer protects the legs. Short, tight sleeves of the tunic (*tunica manicata*) emerge from underneath the edge of the cuirass. The belt (*cingulum*), a symbol of command, wraps twice around the upper body and is knotted on the stomach. The figure is wearing Greek military sandals (*krepides*): open ankle-boots tied to the foot by means of a series of straps crossing over at the front, with laces threaded through six eyelets (*ansae*) and secured to the thick upper strap. The hair is held in place by a headband (*taenia*) of Hellenistic origin used as a symbol of royalty, knotted at the back of the head. Originally, the left hand of this statue probably held a lance.

SHOWCASE **F**

LNS 1800 M
No. 17

Unlike the other two loricate statues in The al-Sabah Collection which are wearing diadems, this statue wears a helmet. The iconographic scheme, consisting of helmet, offensive weapon (lance) and *cuirass* seems to evoke representations of **Ares**, inspired by imperial symbology. Ares is the armed god par excellence, carrying a lance and shield and wearing a helmet.

There is a miniature version of this figure from Yemen in the British Museum, London. Here, the figure is shown in the act of pouring out a libation (offering at the shrine) with the *patera* (shallow dish used in religious ceremonies) held in his right hand, perhaps just before going into battle; in his (fragmentary) left hand he once held a lance.



Bronze statuette (H 9.1 cm) of cuirassed Ares with helmet, or a deified ruler, in the act of making a libation (The British Museum, inv. no BM 122021).

SHOWCASE **G**

LNS 1686 M **No. 19**

Among the toiletry requisites of the South Arabian woman, the **mirror**, of course, had a special place. In fact the text on this mirror says it was commissioned by a woman named Labu', which means 'lioness'. It was probably part of the bride's trousseau, and could come from her tomb.

The mirror itself is made from a flat disc with a thickened border. Since the central decoration goes all around the handle, it seems likely that both faces of the disc were originally polished to be reflective.

The trumpet shape of the silver handle is a known South Arabian votive object, here adapted for the mirror. Generally, the handles of the mirrors were mostly made of wooden, bone or metal cylinders.

In the first Dionysiac scene, to the right of the altar, there is a winged female genius. On the left, a nude satyr (a male nature spirit in Greek mythology) carries a jug in his left hand and a small flask in his right hand, from which he is pouring a liquid into a globular vessel placed on an altar. The second scene shows a nude satyr in ecstasy, carrying a leopard skin on his right arm and holding a Dionysian staff (*thyrsus*) in his left hand. Facing the satyr, her wings spread, a female genius is holding an ewer in her right hand and a bowl in her left.

LNS 1640 M **No. 20**

The body of this casket (*pyxis* in Latin) features a mixture of mythological and genre figures, holding items, and carrying out actions, related to the bride next to the bed. There are servants and musicians, and a god standing on a plinth, holding a vessel containing stalks of wheat and pomegranates, both symbols of fertility and reproduction. A musician is dancing on tiptoe and playing a percussion instrument, probably cymbal, often used in pairs; another female figure, also dancing on tiptoe, plays a lyre, a stringed musical instrument.

Represented on the lid is **Medusa** (Gorgon), a monster figure in Greek mythology, having snakes for hair. She is surrounded by five battling **centaurs**. These are creatures from Greek mythology with the upper body of a human and the lower body and legs of a horse.

LNS 1692 M **No. 21**

On the lid of the casket is a female bust, surrounded by a **centaur** holding an animal skin, facing a panther that is attacking him from the top of a hill. Another centaur, wearing a helmet and carrying a spear and oval shield, hurls himself at a lion attacking him from the top of a small mound. The figures on the body of the casket are linked to ceremonial practices related to a nuptial scene featuring the bride and her maidservants. They are protected by a winged deity, probably *Shams*, responsible for protecting royal and aristocratic lineages.

The **wild boar** is an unknown subject in South Arabian figurative images, but in Hellenic myths it has a religious meaning. The aristocracy and warrior classes considered it a courageous animal and a worthy adversary

LNS 1693 M **No. 22**

Dionysus, represented at the centre of the lid, is the god of fruitfulness and vegetation. He is surrounded by two centaurs, mythological creatures (half men and half horses), one of which holds an animal skin and confronts an attacking panther, and the other holds a shield and faces a lion.

On the body of the casket, a Maenad and Eros are dancing while Eros plays a lyre. A hunter (*venator*) or gladiator is fighting a lion, and winged **Erotes** are depicted, in accordance with a Greco-Roman iconography popular throughout the Mediterranean from the Hellenistic period onwards.

In ancient Greek religion and mythology, the Erotes are a collective of winged gods associated with love. They were usually portrayed as nude, handsome, winged youths.

SHOWCASE **H**

LNS 1782 M - No. 23

LNS 1667 M - No. 24

LNS 1772 M - No. 26

The **ladle** (*simpulum* in Latin) would have been used for scooping liquid from a larger vessel and pouring it into a drinking vessel, or for religious rites known as “libation”. Libation is an act of pouring a liquid during a sacrifice to a deity in a temple. A ladle could also have been used to measure out wine being poured into goblets at banquets, or for precisely measuring mixtures of water and wine. Tableware items such as this, made for local elites, began to be used in South Arabia following contacts with the Roman world.

Two of the three ladles in The al-Sabah Collection bear the names of the male owners, who, socially, would have belonged to society's highest class. This is also confirmed by high-quality of the ladles, above all LNS 1667 M, made from expensive material. It is probable that these ladles come from a temple.

The finial of the South Arabian ladles’ handles can be decorated with a small sphere, or with an animal head. These might include a panther, a camel, an antelope, or a ram.

LNS 1713 M

No. 27

The Greek name **Aphrodite** seems to mean 'risen from the foam' (*aphros*) of the sea of the island of Cyprus. In fact, all representations of Aphrodite in Greek and Roman art are somehow related to water, and often she is depicted naked, as this bronze statue. During the Hellenistic period, the Greeks identified Aphrodite with the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis. The devotion to this goddess became common in Egypt starting in the early Ptolemaic times and continued after Egypt became a Roman province. The ancient Romans identified Aphrodite with their goddess Venus, who was originally a goddess of agricultural fertility.

Statues of Aphrodite, whose iconography is an eastern interpretation of original Greek and Roman types, were especially popular in Egypt and Syria. The present statue may have come from a workshop in Antarados (Tartus) in Syria or from one of the workshops on the central Levantine coast. What was her role in traditional local worship? The context of her discovery is unknown, and there are no traces of inscriptions, but the crescent moon, a South Arabian religious symbol, seems to indicate that Aphrodite was probably assimilated with a local deity.

LNS 1803 M

No. 28

The goddess **Athena** is associated primarily with Athens, to which she gave her name and protection. Athena is customarily portrayed wearing an *aegis* (an animal skin or a shield, sometimes featuring the head of a Gorgon, a woman's face with horrifying visage, having hair made of living snakes), a helmet, and carrying a shield and a lance. The image of Athena was known in South Arabia from the 1st century BCE. In the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, the image of the goddess Athena – or the Roman Minerva – frequently appears in reliefs and statues in the round, in stone as well as in bronze, in the public sphere (baths, theatres, colonnaded streets) as well as in a religious context (temples and sanctuaries). She is sometimes identified with the Arabian goddess Allat (al-Lāt, 1st to 3rd century CE).

The Greco-Roman deity Athena could have been worshipped in this remote part of the Arabian Peninsula, well beyond the borders of the Roman provinces, just as she was in Palestine's coastal region, in the Decapolis (the cities in north-eastern Palestine), in Syria (especially Hauran and Palmyra) and in Arabia.

SHOWCASE J

LNS 1802 M
No. 30

The iconography of a female figure with braids can be seen in the alabaster head LNS 548 S in The al-Sabah Collection and in small funerary or votive South Arabian stone stelae (1st century CE).

Since the arms are missing, the correlation between this statue and the other similar figures is essential for an understanding of her arms' original position. She may have had her arms flexed holding a symbolic object in one or both hands, either a twig, a bird, a bowl, or stalks of wheat. In a stela from Baynūn, the female figure wears a crown and holds a twig in one hand and a dove in the other. It is also possible that the woman may have been shown in the act of making an offering of a frankincense grain, just like the statues of Aphrodite and Athena in The al-Sabah Collection (LNS 1713 M and LNS 1803 M).

An amulet in the shape of a crescent moon hangs from a long chain between the woman's breasts. This type of amulet had a long tradition in the ancient Near East and its use was widespread in the Roman period during the first centuries of the Common Era. It was probably introduced to South Arabia from Syria, where it can be seen on several female busts from Palmyra.



Woman with a crown and braids holding a sprig and a bird, from Baynūn, Yemen.
(S. Antonini 2012, p. 35, fig. 6)