

# ART ANCIENT



## A CORINTHIAN HELMET WITH BULL HORNS AND LOTUS FLOWER DECORATION

Archaic Period, c.550-500 B.C.

Cast, hammered and incised bronze

Height 21.6 cm

### PROVENANCE

From the collection of Axel Guttman (1944-2001), Berlin (Inv. no. AG564, H202)

Subsequently, *The Art of Warfare: The Axel Guttman Collection, Part 1*, Christie's, London, 6 November 2002, Lot 46.

Subsequently Christie's, New York, 26 January 2023, Lot 75.

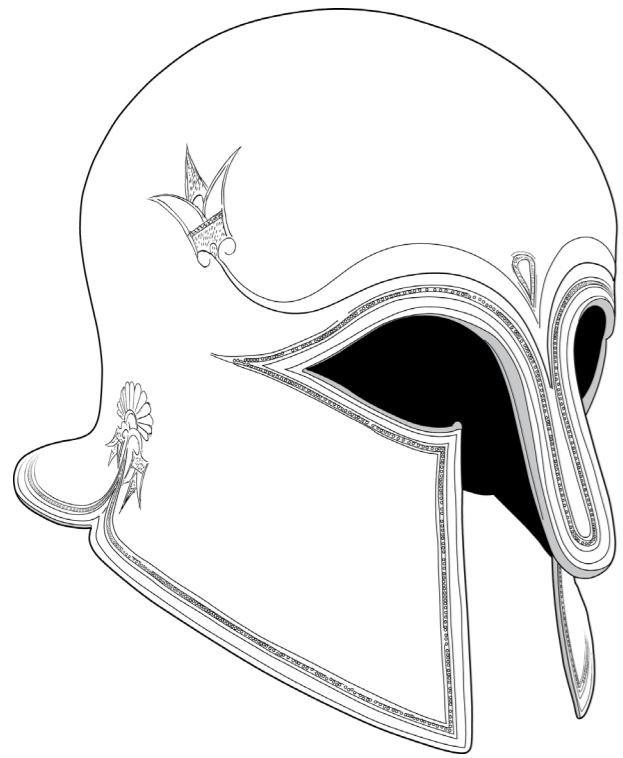
### PUBLISHED

Hixenbaugh, R. *Ancient Greek Helmets: A Complete Guide and Catalog*, New York, 2019, p.390, Cat. No. C382.

An exceptionally well preserved example of one of the most iconic ancient Greek artefacts. This is the finest and best preserved example of an elaborate helmet type represented on the celebrated Archaic masterpiece, *The Armento Rider*.

Cast and hammered in bronze, with thickened nose guard and pointed cheek pieces, the rounded crown curving down into a flared neck piece. The elegant curvilinear eye holes taper to a point, decorated with a punched and incised border decoration that follows the outer edge of the helmet. The bull horns, modelled in light relief, swoop over the brow with finely chased lotus flowers blooming from the ends. An incised motif sits above the nose guard between the brows, probably depicting a lotus bud.





### The Corinthian Helmet: The Bronzsmith's Canvas

The sixth century B.C. was a time of continual technological and artistic improvement, with Greek armoursmiths spearheading the advance. Taken as trophies of war and dedicated to the Gods, Corinthian helmets recovered from the Sanctuary of Zeus in Olympia have provided invaluable evidence to their development and design.<sup>1</sup> In the first stage, the helmet, often made from two sheets of metal welded together, was characterised by a short nose guard and a rigid, upright bell shape with straight sides.<sup>2</sup> By the sixth century B.C. however, decades of battle experience had resulted in further shaping of the helmet to suit the wearer's skull. The second phase helmet, to which the present piece belongs, is identified by the elongated neck guard and curvilinear forms.<sup>3</sup> Metallurgical advancements also meant that the Corinthian helmet was now hammered or cast from one sheet of metal, which further resulted in the thickened nose guard extant in our example.<sup>4</sup>

Artistically, a phase two Corinthian helmet was the bronzsmith's canvas. Specifically characterised by greater ornamentation, many phase two helmets also share the archetypal decorative element of the bull horns, which originate from the narrowest point of the nose guard and follow the line of the eye cut outs to the edge of the brow. Bull horns were a clear choice for decoration. In many ancient societies, bulls were recognised for their strength and virility, and were widely associated with

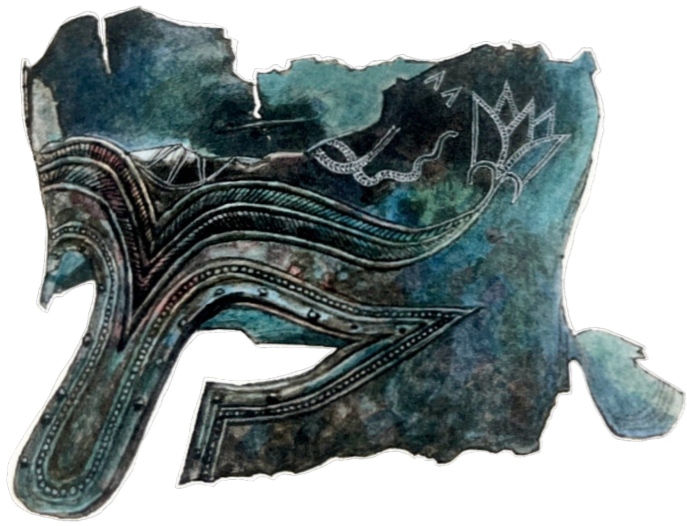
**1** Line drawing of the present Corinthian helmet, showing incised decoration of bulls horns and lotus flowers.



**2** Detail of *The Armento Rider*, c.550 B.C. Bronze, H. 25.4 cm. The British Museum, London.

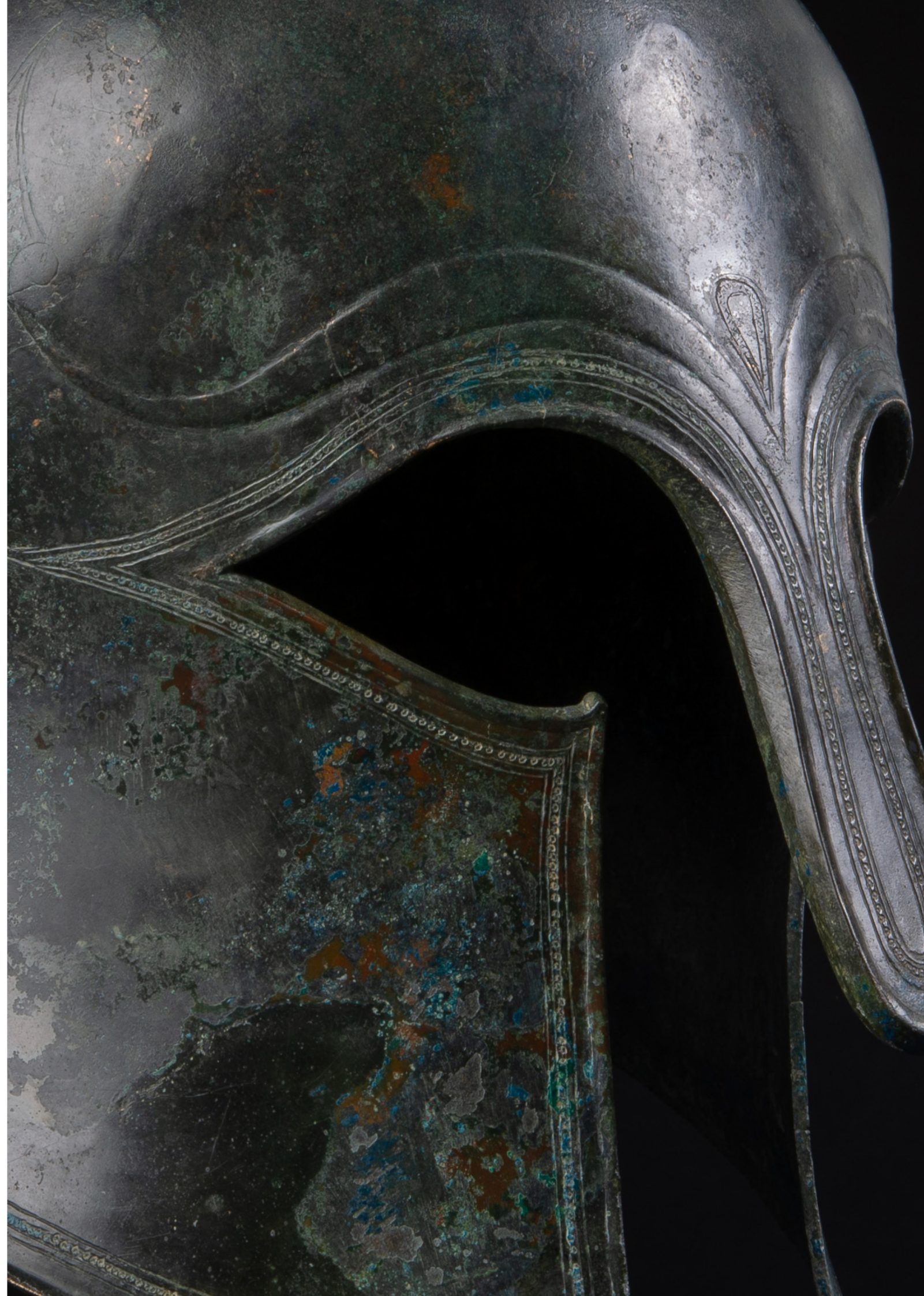
mythological and supernatural figures.<sup>5</sup> In wearing a helmet that bore large proud horns, the warrior cast himself as the formidable creature, and undoubtedly struck fear into the hearts of his enemies. The bull horns blossoming effortlessly into a lotus flower, however, is a particularly distinctive design type of the phase two Corinthian helmet.

Remarkably, this very helmet type is known from 'one of the first and most powerful sculptural productions' of Greater Greece (Magna Graecia), The British Museum's *Armento Rider* (Fig. 2).<sup>6</sup> It is likely that helmets such as this were worn by members of the south Italian aristocracy.<sup>7</sup> Only three extant versions preserving this type of ornamentation are known, of which ours is the finest and most complete.<sup>8</sup> The two others are: a helmet fragment in the collection of the Museo Archaeologico in Bari, found in Canosa, Italy (Fig. 3); and a helmet in the collection of the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels, identified by The British Museum as a find from the ancient Egyptian port of Naukratis (Figs 4 & 5).<sup>9</sup>



**3** (top) Corinthian helmet, Lotus Flower Group, c.550-500 B.C., H. 15.2 cm. Found in Canosa, Italy. Museo Archeologico, Bari.

**4 & 5** Corinthian helmet, Lotus Flower Group, c. late 6th century, H. 21cm. Excavated from Naukratis, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels (Inv. No. A.1948)





### The Age of the Hoplite

Emerging from the Dark Age, Greece in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. was defined by a period of expansion, discovery and innovation, underpinned by the philosophical ideals of self-determination and political representation. Greek traders and colonists transported forward thinking Greek values overseas, establishing colonies and transforming enslaved enclaves into free, politically represented and prosperous communities. With this expansion ultimately underpinned by Greece's renowned and widely revered military, the hoplite's panoply, and in particular his helmet, became a visual cornerstone of Greek society.

To the individual hoplite - the hero of the Homeric epic - his armour was his pride and joy, a marker of his economic status and the means by which he served his city-state.<sup>10</sup> Whereas outside Greece, fine defensive armour was a prerogative only of the ruling elite, hoplite armour represented the freedom granted by the Greek *polis* to the burgeoning agrarian class to arm itself.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the concept of a hoplite army rested on the foundation that each warrior had the means to generate their own wealth and independence of thought to willingly defend it.<sup>12</sup>

A full panoply of armour could have cost a hoplite between 75 and 100 *drachmas* - the equivalent of 3-5 months pay for a skilled artisan or mercenary.<sup>13</sup> Above all, however, the helmet was the crowning glory. As the most crucial piece of protection, the helmet was also an important personal investment. Indeed, the necessity for a well-fitting helmet to minimise injury meant that these helmets were not handed down from father to son.<sup>14</sup> Decoration was similarly down to personal choice.<sup>15</sup> The importance of the Corinthian helmet to the hoplite's identity in the day-to-day life of ancient Greece is established in its ubiquitous depiction in Archaic vase painting, continuing long after they fell into disuse on the battlefield.

'Tell me, Pistias... why do you charge more for your armour than any other maker?

'Because mine are better, Socrates.'

**6** Chalcidian Amphora depicting the Combat of Heracles and Geryon, featuring two Corinthian helmets. c.550 B.C. Attr. The Inscription Painter. H. 48.2 cm. The British Museum, London.

**7** Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, Book 3, Chapter 10



**8** An Attic red-figure pelike vase by the Trophy Painter depicting Nike (Victory) incising the Corinthian helmet of a trophy of armour, c. 450-440 B.C. H. 35.2cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



'As he spoke, an Egyptian came behind him and put a helmet on his head, saying it was the token of royalty...'

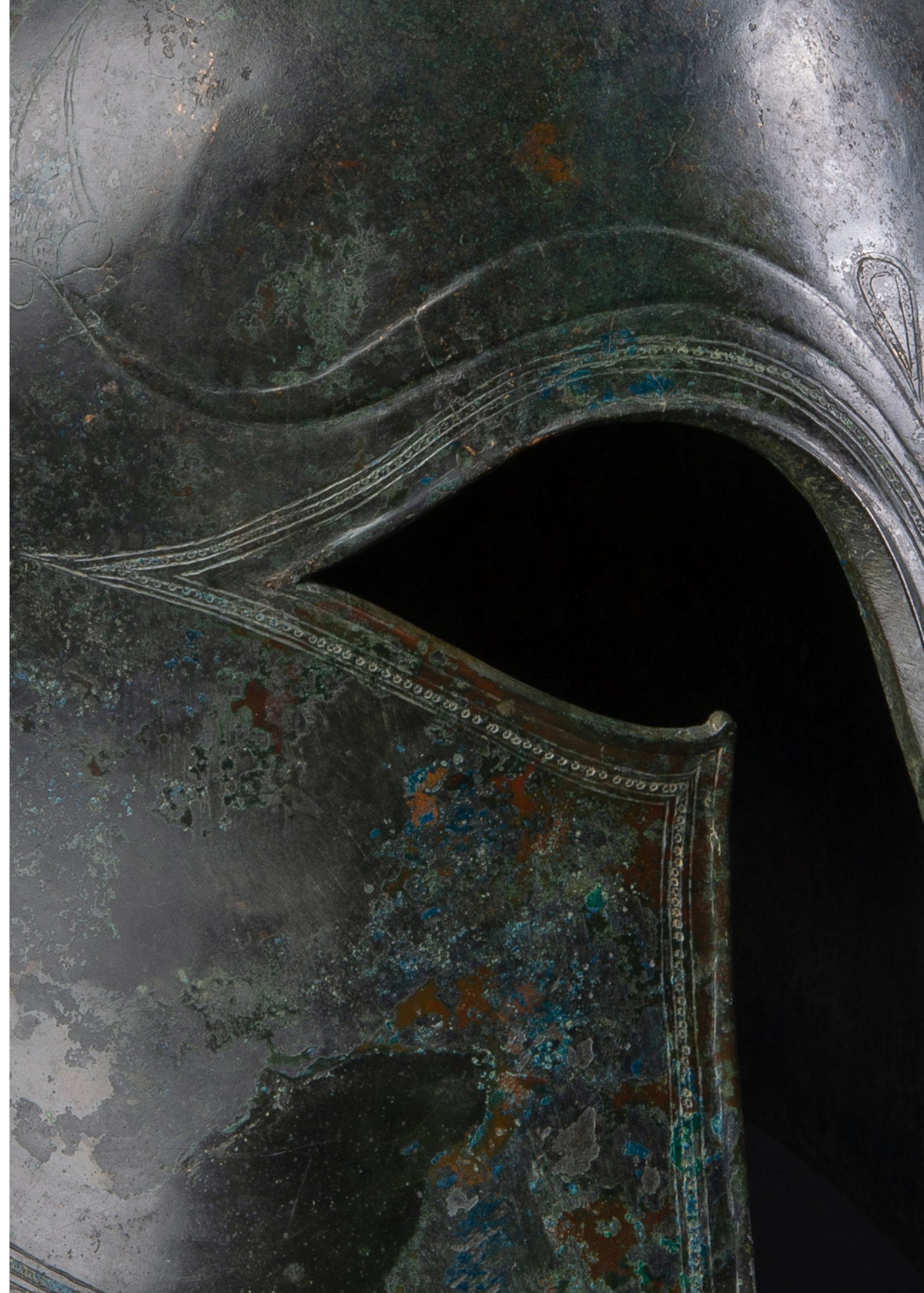
In Greek colonial outposts, such as Magna Graecia, the Corinthian helmet was imbued with the same symbolic significance it was given by the *metropolei*.<sup>6</sup> However, Italy was a unique and prosperous land, and the skilled armoursmiths of the south Italian states soon made their own mark on the hoplite's panoply. Indeed, Corinthian helmets bearing the lotus design have been identified as a product of the cosmopolitan cities of Magna Graecia, with scholars positing Syracuse and Tarentum as sites of manufacture.<sup>17</sup> The *Armento Rider* and the present helmet convey a unique expression of such Greek colonial identity.<sup>18</sup>

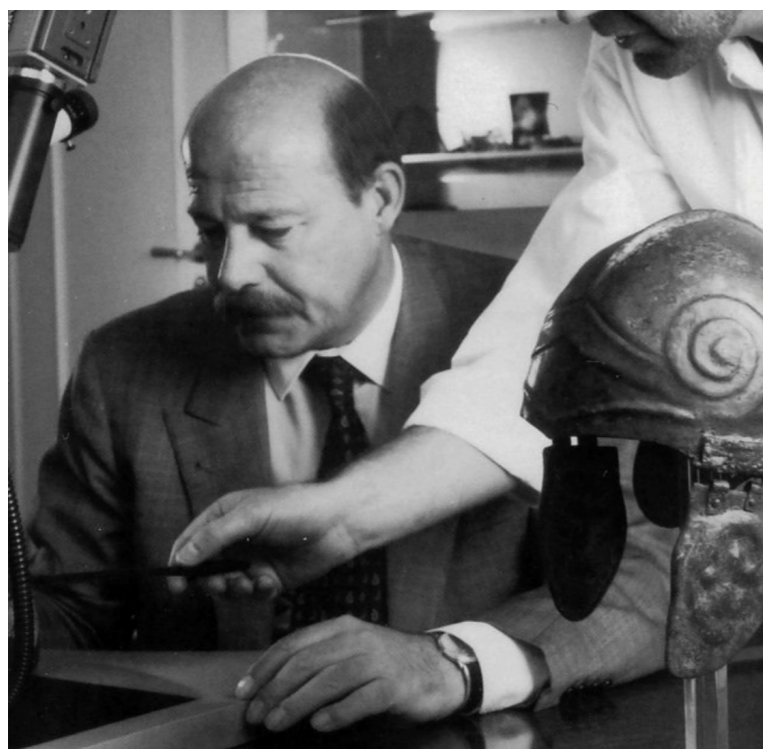
Far beyond Greece, the Corinthian helmet invoked an ancient and revered military ideal that reverberated around the Classical world. Later, it would be revived by the Roman army, as a unique privilege of the officer class. After two millennia, the Corinthian helmet - named for posterity by the Father of History himself, Herodotus - is an enduring and iconic symbol for ancient Greek culture and the philosophical, intellectual and artistic foundations it established.

**9** (left) The Autun Helmet, Gallo-Roman, 1st Century B.C. - 1st Century A.D. Rolin Museum, Autun, France.

**10** (right) Roman Marble Bust of a Greek General wearing a Corinthian helmet. 1st-2nd Century C.E. H. 48.6 cm. Metropolitan Museum, New York.

**11** Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 2, Chapter 162





### The Axel Guttman Collection

Axel Guttman (1944 - 2001) was a German building contractor and avid collector of antiquities. Having bought his first ancient piece of armour, a Roman helmet, in 1982, over the next eleven years, he amassed a remarkable collection of over 1200 objects, including 174 helmets, which were housed in his villa in Berlin-Dahlem. His collection spanned across both centuries and continents, from the western Mediterranean to the Near East, from the Bronze Age to the fall of the Roman Empire. By making his collection available for academics and exhibitions, he greatly assisted our understanding of the development of ancient weaponry and armour. He also produced the publication series *Sammlung Axel Guttman*, which remains a leading source of scholarship on ancient arms and armour to this day.

### FOOTNOTES

- 1 R. Hixenbaugh, *Ancient Greek Helmets*, 2019, 154.
- 2 H. Frielinghaus, *Die Helme Von Olympia*, 2011, 15-18.
- 3 R. Hixenbaugh, 199; H. Frielinghaus, 22-28.
- 4 R. Hixenbaugh, 136, 199.
- 5 R. Hixenbaugh, 223-4.
- 6 Quote from catalogue entry, No. 20 in D. Ekserdjian (ed.), *Bronze*, 2012, 257.
- 7 T. Potts, *Civilization*, 1990, 128.
- 8 These examples were identified through a search of the collections of The British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Mougins Museum of Classical Art and the Antikensammlung erlin, as well as a survey of several leading studies on ancient Greek helmets, including, inter alia, the seminal catalogue by specialist and dealer Randall Hixenbaugh, the study of the helmets of Olympia by Professor Heide Frielinghaus of the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, and the survey of the Lipperheide and Bestände private collections at the Antikenmuseum of Berlin by German classical archeologist, Hermann Pflug (et al). Our research has also included the past 100 years of auction results. Some example in private collections or those not yet known may have been overlooked.
- 9 R. Hixenbaugh, 411, Cat. No. C548; Inv. No. A.1948. The helmet is also catalogued on the British Museum's website (Accession No. A.1948) as part of the Museum's Naukratis Project, a research collaboration that aimed to virtually reunite finds from the ancient port of Naukratis, today distributed over 80 museums worldwide. [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/X\\_3063](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/X_3063)
- 10 A. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks*, 1967, 58-9.
- 11 R. Hixenbaugh, 50.
- 12 A. Snodgrass, 'The Hoplite Reform and History,' (1965), 114.
- 13 M. Merrony (ed.) *Mougins Museum of Classical Art*, 2011, 188.
- 14 A. Snodgrass, 1967, 59.
- 15 R. Hixenbaugh, 238; T. Everson, *Warfare in Ancient Greece*, 2004, 83.
- 16 R. Hixenbaugh, 247.
- 17 R. Hixenbaugh, 221.
- 18 L. Burn, *The British Museum Book of Greece*, 1991, 103.

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# APPENDIX A

X-RAYS

