

SEVEN ANCIENT ROMAN TERRACOTTA LAMPS

Artist: Unknown
 Date: 1st to 7th Centuries AD
 Dimensions: Approximately 18 x 7 cm
 Material: Terracotta
 Inventory Number: 61595, 61480, 61990, 61617, 61419, 62152, 61505

Total Cost: € 5.625,00

STATE OF PRESERVATION:

These lamps have several damaged or missing areas which must be repaired or replaced. After conducting the scientific investigation, the restorers will complete the intervention by cleaning and rebalancing of the surface.

RESTORATION PROCESS INCLUDES:

- Removal of dust
- Complete cleaning
- Consolidation of cracks and gaps
- Reintegration of missing parts
- Scientific research
- Photographic documentation

These terracotta lamps were made for practical purposes, to fulfill the need for light at night. In the latter centuries before Christ, however, they had already started to assume broader functions. Their role in religious worship is widely documented, used in religious festivals and processions. Occasionally, they were used as votive objects dedicated to the deity. During funerary rites, clay lamps were placed together with the burning torches next to the mortuary bed during the exposure of the corpse in the atrium of the house. They were also placed inside tombs alongside other everyday objects in order to help the deceased feel at home in the hereafter. Some inscriptions attest that these lamps were kept burning after the burial emphasizing the role of the lamp in funeral rites and worship of the dead, rather than as a simple piece of furniture.

With the advent and spread of the Christian religion, oil lamps took on an eschatological significance, becoming a symbol of Christ, the true Light. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life," John 8:12. Through His Word and actions, Jesus is the light that illuminates the path.

The lamps were burning continuously in the catacombs to give light to the dark corridors and to serve as a symbol of Christ's saving light. With this new meaning, artisans began to decorate the lamps with Christian



symbols such as the fish, the dove, other images derived from biblical texts.

This remarkable collection of lamps housed in the Christian Museum is one of great historical value. There are lamps of various types, ranging from the first to seventh centuries AD. They have been found in a variety of locations including the archaeological excavations carried out in the tunnels of the catacombs. Some came from the famous 17th and 18th- century collections of Cardinal Gaspare Carpegna and Knight Francesco Vettori, the first curator of the Christian Museum, nominated by Benedict XIV.

The clay lamps proposed for this restoration are currently on display in the Christian Museum. Two of these pieces come from the cemetery of Callistus on Via Appia. The first is decorated with beads and a rosette perhaps dating to the 3rd or 4th centuries AD (Inv. 61595) and the second with palm branches dating between 4th and 6th centuries AD (Inv. 61480). The other four provide a sample of the wide variety on display in the Museum. There is a "lamp with an anvil beak" or Vogelkopflampe dating to the 2nd century AD (Inv. 61990), whose form is characteristically reminiscent of a bird's head. There is also a stylized fish lamp dating from the end of the 4th and 7th centuries AD (Inv. 61617). There is a Syro-Palestinian lamp with an inscription on the back, dating between the 6th and 7th centuries AD (Inv. 61419), as well as a lamp made of African "terra sigillata" and decorated with a floral pattern inscribed within circles and decorated with stylized palm branches along the top edge, from the 4th century AD (Inv. 62152). Lastly there is an oil lamp decorated with shells dating between the 5th and 6th centuries AD.