

T O M A S S O



The Master of the Budapest Abundance (active c. 1550)

Allegory of Abundance

Bronze, with rich brown patina

48.7 cm (19 ¼ in.) high

The present Abundance, identifiable thanks to the cornucopia she holds in her left hand, is a fascinating example of the encounter between the Northern Italian and German schools in the middle of the sixteenth century, a dialogue that had begun decades earlier with the dissemination of prints across both sides of the Alps. Specifically, our figure is at once indebted to allegories such as the Ceres in the enigmatic *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499) and Albrecht Dürer's celebrated *Great Fortune* engraving of 1501-02.

A magnum opus of remarkable ambition, the *Hypnerotomachia* had been published in Venice at the turn of the century by the Aldine Press, the enterprise of the formidable Aldus Manutius (1449-1515). The story of "Poliphilo's strife of love in a Dream", as the Greek etymology of its title indicates, the book centres on the young man's search for his beloved Polia through enchanted forests and arcane landscapes, filled with ancient ruins and mythological deities and beasts. Whilst the text – written in a highly Latinate vulgata, with reference to ancient Greek, Hebrew and Arabic and to Egyptian hieroglyphs – proves to this day challenging to read, the woodcuts that illustrate it have since their appearance vividly captured the imagination of artists across generations, from Giorgione to Bernini and from Holbein the Younger to Rembrandt.

The connection between our bronze and the Ceres is clear once we observe their mirroring poses, including the raised hand that holds sheaves of wheat in the Ceres (lost in the present work) and the elongated cornucopia visible in both. Yet whilst the *Hypnerotomachia*'s goddess is clothed in a finely pleated robe, our allegory is undressed, quite like a

Venus emerging from the seas, but for a flowing shawl attached to her elaborate headdress. This, together with the diadem across her forehead, is reminiscent of Dürer's Fortune, whose gesture is in turn inspired by models such as the Ceres. A further correlation between Abundance and Fortune is evident in the treatment of the anatomies, with their muscular limbs and generous midriff, the expression of an artistic naturalism of distinctively German character.

Originally our sculpture would have been part of the centrepiece for the dining table of a prosperous household. Functioning as a fountain, it would have delighted and entertained guests whilst pouring wine or other beverages into their cups. A beautiful example, still integral, of one such object is today in the Victoria and Albert Museum's collection (inv. no. M.1-1955). Depicting the tragic encounter between Diana and Actaeon, it was produced around the same period and in the same centre, Nuremberg, as our bronze. This south German city was then at the heart of commercial and cultural exchanges between Italy and Northern Europe, as its rich cultural heritage testifies. Similarly to the Victorian and Albert's composition, the choice of subject in our bronze indicates both knowledge of and a desire to appropriate the humanist tradition for rediscovery of classical antiquity. Yet in stylistic terms Abundance, with its polished surface and vigorously outlined details, from the figure's pupils to the curls in her braids, displays traits idiosyncratic of the Nuremberg School's masters of bronze casting. One such figure was the elusive Master of the Budapest Abundance, whose name derives from a statuette known through versions in the Hungarian capital, but also Vienna and Munich. Compositionally slightly different from our bronze, the Budapest Abundance strongly resembles our bronze in terms of anatomy and technique. In both figures the feet are modelled with regular, marked divisions between the short toes, and the generously plump legs terminate in an ample waist that encircles an almost geometrically circular navel. Her abdomen is strong and her breasts beautifully rounded. Her hair, arranged in an elegant headdress with braids cascading on her shoulders, is outlined in distinctive fashion. Both a synthesis of ideals of beauty from the Italian and German artistic traditions and an homage to antiquity, our Abundance heralds the culmination of the Nuremberg school of bronze casting represented by masters such as Peter Flötner (1486-1546) and Benedikt Wurzelbauer (1548-1620).

RELATED LITERATURE

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