

The Bronze Mice of Apollo Smintheus

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Abstract

Hellenistic-Roman bronze mouse statuettes have traditionally been connected to the god Apollo Smintheus, who appears in the opening scenes of the *Iliad* and who was venerated in Asia Minor. A careful examination of their findspots and the dating of the statuettes show that this association is erroneous. In fact, the mouse statuettes were attached to bronze oil lamps, candelabra, lamp-stands, and other pieces of furniture. They refer directly to the common problem of mice gnawing at wicks and drinking lamp oil, a nuisance that is documented in various ancient texts. Mice were a popular motif that not only created a *trompe l'oeil* effect but also invoked Hellenistic and Roman literary and artistic traditions of an inverted world in which mice undertook human activities that were out of proportion to their small size.*

INTRODUCTION: GREEK AND ROMAN BRONZE MOUSE STATUETTES

Small statuettes of mice are perhaps one of the most common animal depictions in bronze from the Graeco-Roman world. Two examples in the Albertinum in Dresden are superb examples of the type (fig. 1). The first (fig. 2a) is a solid cast bronze. The mouse is represented sitting on its hind legs and chewing on some indiscernible object held between its forepaws. Its tail is broken, but it was originally curled in a loop, the very tip of it touching the mouse's back. A fragment of the tip is still visible on the mouse's body. The statuette is 3.4 cm long and 2.2 cm high with a rough light-green patina.¹ The underside of the statuette,

below the feet, is flat with a small cross-shaped groove. When placed on its hind legs, the mouse falls forward on its nose, which suggests that the groove was meant either for solder or for some other means of attaching the mouse to a base. The second Dresden mouse (see fig. 2b) is somewhat rounder and plumper than the first. It is depicted resting on all four legs, clutching a circular piece of bread (which is incised with intersecting lines) in its front paws. The tail of the second mouse, like that of its companion, is curled back onto its body to form a loop. It measures 4.7 cm in length and 2.4 cm in height and has a smooth, dark-brown patina.² Though the mouse sits perfectly well on its own, the rectangular space between the legs on its underside is unworked, and a small lead-filled circular opening is visible on the mouse's stomach. It is unclear whether this hole was meant to support a now-lost peg or was simply to allow lead filling to be added to a hollow bronze figurine.

Infestations of similar bronze mice are very common in major collections of classical antiquities. There are 15 in the British Museum in London (e.g., fig. 3a–d),³ while the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris has nine.⁴ Seven bronze mice can be found in the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano in Verona, five in the Antikensammlung in Berlin (e.g., fig. 3e), four in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn, and four in the Musée Denon in Chalon-sur-Saône.⁵ There are examples in North American museums

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¹ Dresden, Albertinum, inv. no. AB 138 (unpublished).

² Dresden, Albertinum, inv. no. AB 137 (unpublished).

³ London, British Museum, inv. nos. 1881.1008.1, 1867.0508.803, 1975.301.1, 1975.0301.2, 1975.301.3, 1859.0216.147, 1824.0454.20, 1975.301.4, 1873.0820.257, 1975.0301.5, 1975.301.6, 1874.0805.133 (Walters 1899, nos. 1860–71); inv. nos. 1879.1019.93, 1878.1019.92, 1824.0454.21 (unpublished).

⁴ Babelon and Blanchet 1895, nos. 1209–17; Babelon 1928, nos. 21, 25, pls. 13.21, 13.25.

⁵ Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano: inv. nos. 21758, 21760, 21761, 21762, 21763, 21764, 21765 (all unpublished; thanks to Margherita Bolla for this information). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung: Friederichs 1871, 499, nos. 2399–403 (corresponding to the current inventory numbers). Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn: inv. nos. U 1270, U 1271, 1020, 33748 (Menzel 1986, 134, 137–39). Musée Denon: Boucher 1983, nos. 125–28.



Fig. 1. The two bronze mice in the Albertinum, Dresden.



Fig. 2. Bronze mice in the Albertinum, Dresden: *a*, lgth. 3.4 cm, inv. no. AB 138; *b*, lgth. 4.7 cm, inv. no. AB 137.

as well (e.g., fig. 3f).⁶ Most of the mice, including the pair in Dresden, were obtained by their respective museums between the late 18th and the early 20th century and thus have no real archaeological provenance. Like many bronzes, the mouse statuettes often circulated on the antiquities market and

in various private collections for some time prior to finding permanent homes. As early as 1745, the Italian antiquarian Francesco de Ficoroni illustrated two mouse figurines from Labicum and claimed to have seen several others in various Italian collections (see fig. 3g, h).⁷ Bronze mice frequently appeared in sales

⁶ Cambridge, Mass., Harvard Art Museum, inv. no. 1978.495.45; Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. no. 1985.177; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 67.154.4 (von Bothmer 1968, 102). The Harvard piece is the only example I am aware of that has undergone chemi-

cal analysis; it is a leaded bronze typical of the Roman period. Thanks to Lisa Anderson and Sarah Ebbinghaus for this information.

⁷ de Ficoroni 1745, 78–9.

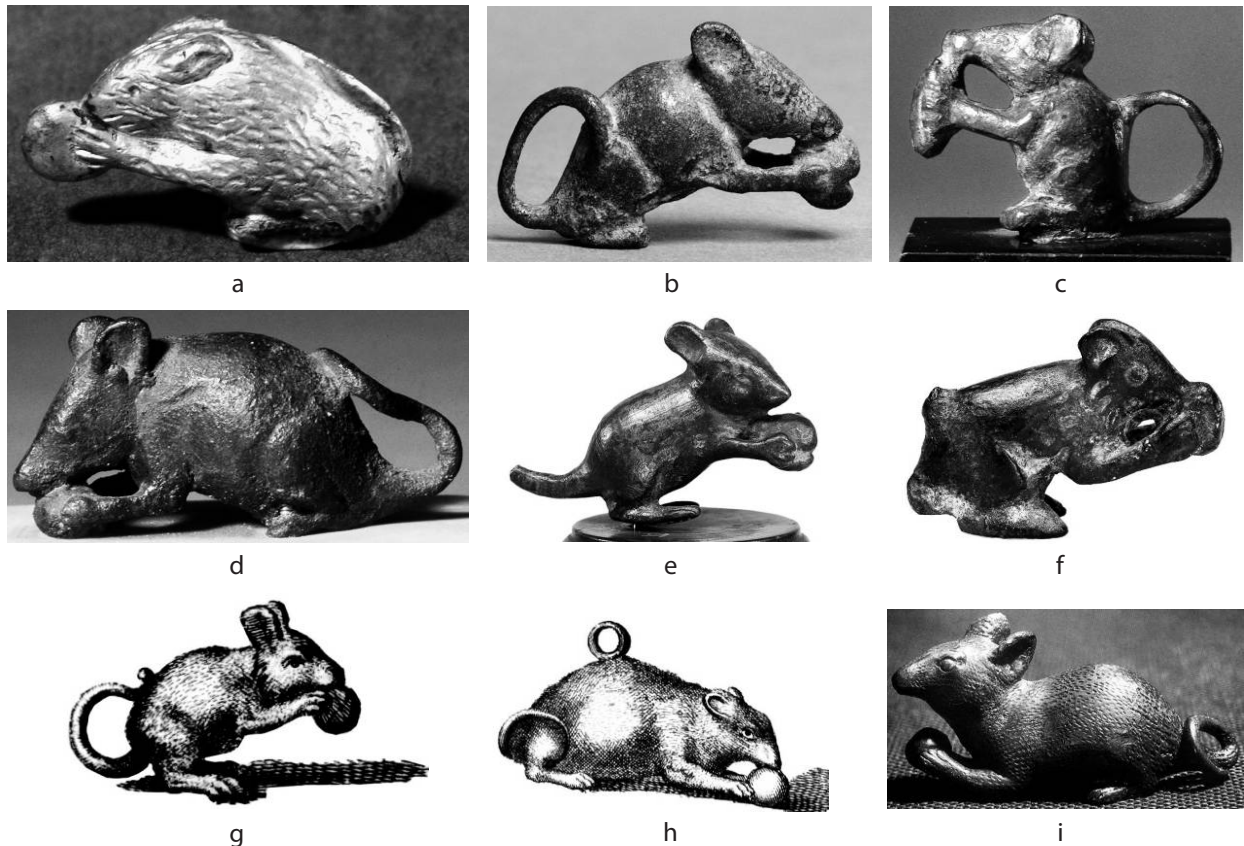


Fig. 3. Examples of Graeco-Roman mouse statuettes: *a*, silver mouse, ht. 2.1 cm, Stansted-Mountfitchet (London, British Museum, inv. no. 1995.0903.1; appx. 1, cat. no. 15); *b*, bronze mouse, ht. 2.9 cm (London, British Museum, inv. no. 1873.0820.257); *c*, bronze mouse, ht. 3.1 cm (London, British Museum, inv. no. 1975.0301.5); *d*, bronze mouse, lgth. 5.0 cm (London, British Museum, inv. no. 1867.0508.803); *e*, bronze mouse, ht. 2.8 cm (Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. no. Fr. 2403); *f*, bronze mouse (Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Transfer from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, inv. no. 1978.495.45); *g*, silver mouse, size unknown, Labicum; *h*, bronze mouse, size unknown, Labicum; *i*, bronze mouse, lgth. 5.2 cm, Oberstimm, Germany (appx. 1, cat. no. 12) (*a–d*, © The Trustees of the British Museum; *e*, J. Laurentius; courtesy Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; *f*, Imaging Department; © President and Fellows of Harvard College; *g*, *h*, de Ficoroni 1745, 79; *i*, © Archäologische Staatssammlung, Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Munich).

catalogues and descriptions of private collections of the 19th and early 20th century and still turn up on the antiquities market today.⁸ Appendix 1 lists those pieces with known findspots.

The two mice in Dresden are typical representatives of the entire group, showing the two main variations in posture seen among the mouse figurines: one sits

on its hind legs, and the other rests on all fours. Some are depicted chewing on indiscernible objects in their front paws, while others hold recognizable crumbs, nuts, or even circular loaves of bread, as is the case with the second Dresden mouse. Two examples are known in silver, and de Ficoroni claimed to have seen a single specimen in gold, one in silver, and another

⁸E.g., Fileri (1991, 100, no. BCors.107b) reproduces an 18th-century drawing of a specimen from an uncertain collection of antiquities in Milan. An example in the De Clerq Collection in 1905 had already been in two previous collections (de Ridder 1905, 255, no. 371). Stephani (1872, 52, no. 100) recorded an example in the Pawlowski Collection in St. Petersburg, and the auction catalogue of Jullien Gréau's bronzes lists a mouse among his Gallo-Roman pieces (Hôtel Drouot 1885, 244, no. 1153). Modern examples include the sales catalogues in the series *Tiere und Mischwesen* of the Swiss dealer Jean-David Cahn (Cahn 1999, lot 94; 2007, lot 67; 2008, lot 54). The so-called Peaceable Kingdom Collection of Leo Mildenberg also contained examples of the bronze mice (Walker 1996, 75, nos. 106, 107). In the course of preparing this article, I assembled a catalogue of more than 100 examples in various public collections.

in rock crystal.⁹ There is significant variation in the overall quality of the pieces within the group and differing degrees to which details were added after casting. The most common post-casting additions are engraved lines that represent fur, and drilled circles and dots that depict or augment the eyes. In some cases, lines or grooves were carved into a figurine after casting to highlight the toes, ears, and mouth. Similarly, in some examples crosses, zigzags, and patterns were engraved on the crumb or circular piece of bread the mouse held in its forepaws. In almost all cases, the tail loops backward and reattaches on the animal's back, though it is occasionally represented lying flat or curled under the mouse's feet.¹⁰ In a few rare instances, the tail was made separately and added after casting.¹¹ All are naturalistic depictions and are roughly life-sized or slightly under-life-sized; most were cast solid in copper alloy.¹²

BRONZE MICE AND APOLLO SMINTHEUS

Since at least the 18th century, bronze mouse statuettes of this type have been associated with the divinity Apollo Smintheus.¹³ Best known from the opening book of the *Iliad*, in which he inflicts a plague on the Greeks, Apollo Smintheus is also attested in inscriptions and on coinage throughout the Troad and Asia Minor from the Hellenistic to the Roman periods. His most celebrated temple was located at Chryse (or Hamixitos, now Turkish Gölpinar) on the west coast of Asia Minor, between Assos and Alexandria Troas, a temple in which Aelian claims live mice were kept

and fed.¹⁴ The epithet "Smintheus" seems to be related to "sminthos," which meant "mouse" in Mysian and Cretan Greek dialects.¹⁵ The name of the god and the significance of mice in the cult was a source of debate in both antiquity and today. Theories range from the relationship between mice, disease, and Apollo's role as a healer to the function of the god as a protector of crops to foundation legends involving mice.¹⁶ Whatever its meaning, there is no doubt that the mouse was one of the main symbols of Apollo Smintheus in ancient art. According to Strabo, the cult statue of Apollo in the temple at Chryse was carved by the artist Scopas and was accompanied by a representation of a mouse and a tripod.¹⁷ Though Scopas' statue is lost and no copies are known, the cult statue of Apollo Smintheus with a mouse is depicted on various coins struck by cities of the Troad and western Asia Minor in both the Hellenistic and Roman periods (fig. 4).¹⁸

The earliest published association of Apollo Smintheus with the bronze mouse statuettes seems to be that of de Ficoroni, who presented the idea in his 1745 treatise on the antiquities of Labicum. De Ficoroni's idea was picked up by the 19th-century antiquarian Giulio Minervini, who published a bronze mouse (fig. 5) in the Barone Collection in 1850.¹⁹ The mouse (now lost) had an inscription on its back, "sacrum | Secund(i)" (a sacred thing [i.e., a dedication] of Secundus), and Minervini concluded that it was a votive offering that had been dedicated by Secundus to Apollo Smintheus.²⁰ Antiquarians such as de Ficoroni and Minervini, as well as other contemporary

⁹ Both of the known silver mice are in the British Museum (London, British Museum, inv. nos. 1866.1229.49 [Shelton 1981, 93, no. 54, pl. 47], 1995.0903.1 [unpublished]). They are catalogued in appx. 1 herein as cat. nos. 14 and 15, respectively. On the gold and rock crystal pieces, see de Ficoroni 1745, 78–9.

¹⁰ Examples with flat tails: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1975.301.1 (Walters 1899, no. 1862); Bonn, Akademische Kunstmuseum der Universität Bonn, inv. no. C317 (Franken 1998, 60, no. 6, fig. 7); Hannover, Kestner August Museum, inv. no. 3212 (Menzel 1964, 28, no. 54, pl. 21).

¹¹ E.g., London, British Museum, inv. no. 1859.0216.147 (Walters 1899, no. 1865); Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlung, inv. no. 4357 (Wünsch 1989, no. 129, figs. 11–13); Bonn, Akademische Kunstmuseum der Universität Bonn, inv. no. C320 (Franken 1998, 61, no. 7, fig. 8).

¹² Though naturalistic sculptures, the statuettes do not provide the detail needed for a zoological classification. Thanks to Nicolà Lutzman (pers. comm. 2011), formerly of the Zoo Zürich, for looking at images of the statuettes and offering his opinion. The fat body of the second Dresden mouse, as well as its thick tail, is suggestive of the dormouse, which was a Roman delicacy (see *infra* n. 58). The thick tails of some mice are reminiscent of rats, but most of the bronzes probably depict the common house mouse. There are two hollow examples (Lon-

don, British Museum, inv. nos. 1874.0805.133 [Walters 1899, no. 1871], 1975.301.3 [Walters 1899, no. 1864]), although the authenticity of the latter piece is perhaps questionable.

¹³ Alternative explanations are rare. Tombolani (1981, 103) and Fogolari (1993, 96) saw the mice as symbols of abundance and fertility. Bolla (1997, 109) saw them as pendants, though this seems most implausible given the general lack of a means to suspend them. Kaufmann-Heinimann (1994, no. 68) identified another example as a weight.

¹⁴ Ael., *NA* 12.5; Hom., *Il.* 1.36–42; Cook 1973, 231–35.

¹⁵ Kirk 1985, 57. Graf (2009, 22–5) believes the epithet had non-Greek origins and was only later associated with the word for mice.

¹⁶ On the origin of the god, his worship, and the etymology of his name, see *RE* 2(2):68–9, s.v. "Apollon" (Wenicke); 2(3):724–26, s.v. "Sminthe" (Bürchner); Roscher 4:1083–85, s.v. "Smintheus"; Farnell 1907, 163–66.

¹⁷ Strabo 13.1.48; cf. Ael., *NA* 12.5.

¹⁸ On the coins, see *BMC* 17:xvi–xviii (Wroth); *LIMC* 2(1):231–32, no. 378a–f, s.v. "Apollon" (Lambrinoudakis); Bellinger 1958, 27–9; 1961, 81–2.

¹⁹ de Ficoroni 1745, 78–9; Minervini 1850, 29–31.

²⁰ Minervini 1850, 29–30, pl. 5.5. The mouse is also listed in *RSGR* 2(2):777, no. 8.



Fig. 4. Bronze coin, 301–281 B.C.E., diam. 13 mm, Alexandria Troas: *obverse*: bust of Apollo; *reverse*: depiction of a statue by Scopas that shows Apollo Smintheus facing right with a mouse at his feet. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Münzkabinett, inv. no. IKMK 18244924 (R. Saczewski).

collectors, were intimately familiar with the *Iliad*, and it is perhaps not surprising that they attributed the bronze mice to the famous mouse god. More recently, and without reference to the early antiquarian texts, 20th- and 21st-century scholars have drawn the same conclusion, identifying comparable mouse statuettes from various collections and excavations as offerings to, or symbols of, the mouse god Apollo Smintheus.²¹

Recently, Künzl and Jackson connected two identical bronze instrument grips—one in the British Museum and the other in the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz (fig. 6)—to Apollo Smintheus.²² Both objects terminate with a representation of a mouse chewing on a nut, with the tail of the animal lying flat along the grip. At first the grips were thought to have been designed to hold a surgical scalpel blade, but Künzl has since revised this interpretation, reidentifying them as grips for a scratcher used to erase wax writing tablets.²³ Whatever the original function of these objects, both were cast with the same Greek inscription: “ΥΓΕΙΝΟΥ | ΚΑΝΠΥΛΙΟΥ | ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟΥ” (Of Hygeinos Kanpylios the neopoios). The example in Mainz is from a group of objects purchased by the museum in 1963 that included medical instruments and was purportedly found in a burial in southwest Asia Minor. Other objects in the same group allow it to be dated to the first half of the third century C.E.²⁴ The

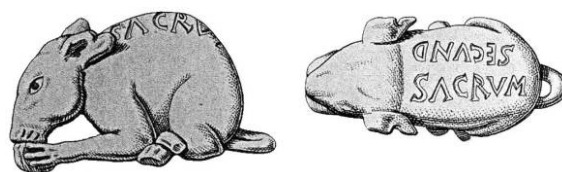


Fig. 5. Bronze mouse with inscription, formerly in the Barone Collection, size unknown (Minervini 1850, pl. 5.5).

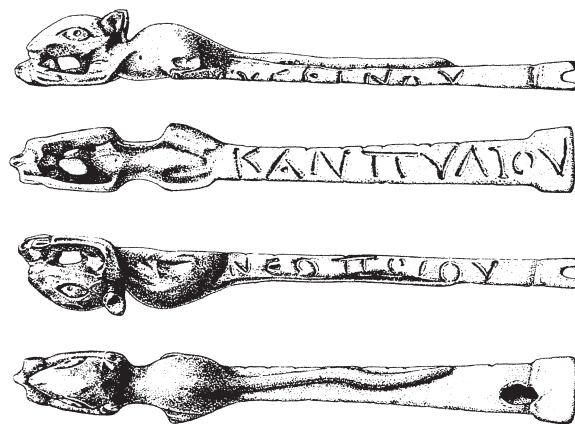


Fig. 6. Bronze grip with mouse terminal and inscription, lgth. 8.3 cm. Mainz, Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, inv. no. O.37862 (after Künzl 1982a, fig. 1).

grip in the British Museum was purchased in Ephesos prior to 1909 from a certain “Mr. Lawson” in Smyrna and was said to have been found in the Artemision in Ephesos.²⁵ The supposed eastern connection and possible medical function of the grips were seen by both Künzl and Jackson as proof of a direct link to the healing god Apollo Smintheus. They argued that Hygeinos Kanpylios held the post of *neopoios* (a temple administrator) in a temple of Apollo Smintheus and perhaps used the grips as a sort of advertising gimmick.²⁶ Though the bronze grips obviously served a different function than the mouse statuettes, the same

²¹ The recently excavated mouse statuettes from Kedesh (Mucznik and Ovadia 2001) and Oberstimm (Schönberger 1978, 185), as well as the specimens in the museums of Celeia (Kolšek 1993) and Geneva (Deonna 1916, 113), have all been associated with Apollo Smintheus.

²² Künzl 1982a; Jackson 1994; Künzl and Koeppel 2002.

²³ Künzl and Koeppel 2002, 66.

²⁴ On the grip (Mainz, Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, inv. no. O.37862), see Künzl 1982a, 111, figs. 1, 2a–d; Künzl and Koeppel 2002, 65–7. On the rest of the group, see Künzl 1982b, 45–6, cat. no. Asia 1, figs. 13–16.

²⁵ Jackson 1994, 328. The bronze grip of a Roman folding

knife in the British Museum (Jackson 1994, 328–29, figs. 7, 8) bears the exact inscription as the mouse grips in Mainz and London, and a third mouse grip has since surfaced in the Leo Mildenberg Collection (Biers 2004, 71–2, no. 6.81), but neither object has an archaeological context. Künzl and Koeppel (2002, 67) reported that yet another mouse grip had been seen on the antiquities market in Amsterdam. In this instance, however, the grip bore the name “Elpidophoros neopoios,” who is elsewhere attested as the director of the Ephesian Museion.

²⁶ Künzl 1982a; Jackson 1994. On the grips as advertising gimmicks, see Künzl and Koeppel 2002, 67.

process of connecting them to the prominent Homeric divinity has been followed.

It is not necessary, however, to connect all depictions of mice in Greek and Roman art to Apollo Smintheus. As a decorative motif, the mouse had an unrelated artistic value of its own. Attractive designs will always be propagated and copied, and it is probable that this happened with the grips of Hygeinos Kanpylos. Mice can be found represented in a very similar way on other utensil grips. One notable example is a 13 cm long iron knife with a bronze handle from a late second- or early third-century C.E. burial at Krefeld-Gellep (fig. 7). The bronze handle of the knife incorporates a mouse with a curled tail—possibly a dormouse—sitting on top of a flowerlike base.²⁷ Another knife grip can be found in the Civico Museo Archeologico “Giovio” di Como, while similar grips with mice, possibly for keys, have been found at Bourges and Cologne.²⁸ De Ficoroni even reported a mouse on a bronze hairpin.²⁹ The presence of mice on multiple objects found in areas far removed from Asia Minor casts more than a slight shadow of doubt on the Apollo Smintheus theory. These mice seem to be purely decorative elements on functional utensils.

Though attractive to antiquarians, collectors, and classicists because of the link to Homer, the connection between the common bronze mouse figurines and Apollo Smintheus is entirely erroneous. With the exceptions of a few coins struck in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor and the lost statue of Scopas, there are no known depictions of Apollo with a mouse anywhere else in classical art.³⁰ Whereas Apollo Smintheus was primarily worshiped in western Asia Minor, the mouse statuettes are known throughout the Roman empire, and while the cult of Smintheus is at least as old as Homer, the mouse figurines range from the Hellenistic to Late Roman periods. No votive mouse statuettes of any kind have been found in the excavations of the Sanctuary of Apollo Smintheus in Chryse. Of the limited number of examples with good archaeological contexts, none has come from a temple of Apollo or indeed from the temple of any other god. In fact, only the inscribed mouse of the Barone Collection mentioned above can be said to have had any kind of sacral context.



Fig. 7. Iron knife with bronze grip from a third-century C.E. burial at Krefeld-Gellep, lgth. 13 cm (after Pirling 1986, fig. 44).

BRONZE MOUSE STATUETTES AS ATTACHMENTS

Given the inability of most of the mouse statuettes to stand alone, it is fairly safe to assume that they were attached to some kind of supporting base. In the case of the utensil grips described above, the mouse and bronze grip were cast in a single piece, allowing the function of the entire object to be recognized. The mouse statuettes, in contrast, must have been attached to some separate object that is now lost, and the method of their attachment might provide a clue to what that object was. As is the case with many ancient bronzes, most of the mice were firmly anchored to marble and wooden bases in the 19th century or earlier, such that a full examination of their undersides is seldom possible. Moreover, early collectors and antiquarians generally sought to preserve the aesthetic appearance and display value of their bronzes above all else, not hesitating to drill holes, make restorations, or remove unsightly ancient pegs to allow the bronzes to be more easily displayed in a cabinet. For this reason, distinguishing between modern alterations and the original state of the underside of a bronze figurine is not always straightforward.

Fortunately, no antiquarian restorations or alterations appear to have been made to the two mice in Dresden, and I have since had the opportunity to examine some 25 of their cousins in person.³¹ In most cases where the undersides or soles of the feet of the figurines are accessible and there are no obvious signs of modern fiddling, there is an absence of any marking to indicate how the figurines were attached to a base in antiquity. Thus, it is probably safe to assume that most of the mice were attached to metal bases by means of soldering. While bronze statuettes

²⁷ Pirling 1986, 75, figs. 44, 45; Pirling and Siepen 2006, 414–15 (Grave 3853/5), pl. 72.11.

²⁸ Bourges: *RSGR* 3:223, no. 7. Cologne: Franken 1996, 48, no. 34, fig. 58 (Cologne, Römisch-Germanisches Museum, inv. no. N4296). The grip is from the Niessen Collection, which was largely formed from grave goods of burials excavated around Cologne in the mid to late 19th century. Como: Bolla and Tabone 1996, 252, cat. no. B 35 (Como, Civi-

co Museo Archeologico “Giovio” di Como, ex Garovaglio Collection, inv. no. D 330).

²⁹ de Ficoroni 1745, 78.

³⁰ *LIMC* 2(1):232, s.v. “Apollon” (Lambrinoudakis).

³¹ The pieces in the British Museum, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, the Römisch-Germanisches Museum, and the Nationalmuseum in Copenhagen.

were sometimes connected to their bases with pegs, soldering was also a common method. Even much larger figural statuettes could be secured to metal bases by solder. For example, all the bronze statuettes of gods, goddesses, and their attributes from the Weißenburg treasure were soldered to their bases, and it was the traces of solder or changes in the patina of the tops of the bases in the hoard that allowed the statuettes to be reattached.³² That solder alloys (usually mixtures of lead and tin) melt at a much lower temperature than bronze and oxidize at a faster rate in its presence explains the large quantities of loose bronze bases and the loose attributes of all kinds that can be found in museum collections. The silver mice from the Esquiline treasure (appx. 1, cat. no. 14) and Stansted-Mountfitchet (appx. 1, cat. no. 15) as well as the bronze mouse recently found at Hayton in Yorkshire (appx. 1, cat. no. 7) all have traces of lead solder on their undersides. To what sort of objects were the bronze mice attached? That they were soldered on shows only that they were normally connected to metal rather than to wooden bases.

Very few bronze mice are still attached to a base of some kind or show evidence of attachment. One example, now in the British Museum, was made by casting the mouse and its base in a single piece. The animal is perched on the very edge of the rectangular stepped base (lgth. 3.3 cm x width. 2.0 cm x ht. 2.7 cm), looking off into space and holding a crumb. The flat tail of the mouse occupies the rest of the top of the base, which probably served as a crowning element on a piece of wooden furniture.³³ A flat bronze base from Trier (appx. 1, cat. no. 17) supports two mice holding the same piece of bread (fig. 8a).³⁴ It also probably served as a decorative element on some piece of furniture. Two mice in Berlin yielded surprises when examined in person, a reminder of the importance of direct experience when working with antiquities. One turned out to have been cast in a single piece with a thick ring (diam. 1.5 cm) coming out of its belly. The ring was embedded in the modern base and was therefore not visible in the published photographs (see fig. 8b).³⁵ This sort of ring attachment is usually associated with cords or leather thongs in horse gear and similar

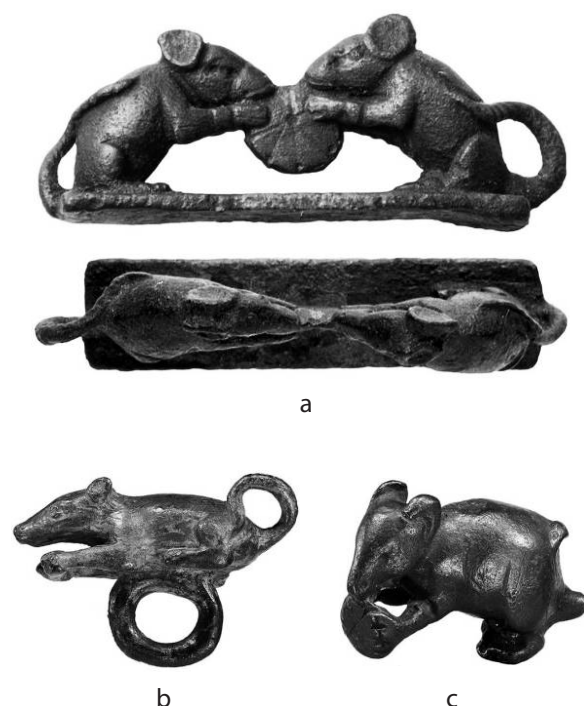


Fig. 8. Some rare examples of mice with surviving bases and evidence of attachment: *a*, bronze mice, lgth. 5 cm, Trier (appx. 1, cat. no. 17) (courtesy Rheinische Landesmuseum Trier); *b*, bronze mouse with ring, lgth. 3.8 cm (Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. no. Fr. 2399) (J. Laurentius; courtesy Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung); *c*, bronze mouse pierced with an iron rod (which is visible here emerging from its back), lgth. 4.4 cm (Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. no. Fr. 2402) (courtesy Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Antikensammlung).

equipment, but it may also have been part of a hinge or a system of suspension in a hanging lamp or tinnabulum (wind charm). The second surprise (see fig. 8c) was the presence of an iron rod that pierced the body of a crouching mouse.³⁶ This rod likely supported a decorative candelabra or lampstand from which the mouse had been detached. The extraneous pieces of iron were probably filed off to create a more attractive object when the piece was first sold as

³² On the Weißenburg treasure, see Kellner and Zahlhaas 1993. Not one of the bases in the hoard used pegs to connect to the fairly large (15–20 cm high) statuettes that were found with them.

³³ London, British Museum, inv. no. 1881.1008.1 (Walters 1899, no. 1860).

³⁴ This object was found at Hubert-Neuerburg-Straße at the construction site of the new *Finanzamt* and is now in a private

collection in Trier (Faust 2004–2005, 172, no. 27).

³⁵ Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. no. 2399 (Friederichs 1871, 499, no. 2399; Heilmeyert 1988, 242, case 18.5, no. 9).

³⁶ Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. no. 2402 (Friederichs 1871, 499, no. 2402; Heilmeyert 1988, 242, case 18.5, no. 8).

an antiquity. These two mice in Berlin and another from a hoard of bronzes in Augusta Raurica provide critical clues to the broader meaning of the mouse statuettes in general.

A LARARIUM GROUP WITH A MOUSE FROM AUGUSTA RAURICA

A sensational hoard of bronzes excavated at Augst (Roman Augusta Raurica) in 1983 (fig. 9) included a bronze mouse figurine attached to a bronze shelf (fig. 10). The hoard was buried in an oak box below the floor of a Roman house, probably at the time of the Germanic incursions of the 260s.³⁷ Apart from the shelf with the mouse, the hoard included statuettes of a lar, Mercury, Hercules, and Somnus and a base with only a small goat and cock still attached to it indicating that it had once borne another Mercury statuette.³⁸ Some of the statuettes were already quite old at the time of the hoard's deposition, the lar and Mercury probably dating to the late first century C.E. The presence of a lar in the group and the domestic context of the hoard indicate that the ensemble represents the durable (and valuable) components of a lararium, or household shrine.³⁹

The mouse in the Augst group (appx. 1, cat. no. 2) was soldered onto the edge of the top side of a flat shelf and faces out into space; it has a curled tail and holds a round piece of bread in its forepaws. Three (originally four) volutes are attached to the underside of the shelf. Two discolored patches on the opposite side of the shelf correspond exactly to the feet of the Somnus statuette, which was found some 50 cm away from the shelf in the box.⁴⁰ The 9.9 cm high statuette of the nude god of sleep is shown in a pose known from Hellenistic prototypes, tipping poppy seeds out of a container in his extended right hand while holding a horn filled with poppy juice in his left. Some 15 comparable bronze statuettes of Somnus are known, all of which belong to the second century C.E.⁴¹

As the thin bronze shelf is only 16 cm long and a mere 5.7 cm wide, it is unlikely to have been used to support any of the other statuettes from the hoard. The lar stands on an unusual hemispherical base that was clearly intended to be mounted on something

else. A slit on the top of the base of the large Mercury statuette shows that it once surmounted a thesaurus or coin box. The Hercules statuette might just have fit on the shelf, provided the Somnus statuette was attached facing outward. The base for the lost Mercury statuette would also fit. Both, however, would probably have been quite out of proportion to the shelf, mouse, and figure of Somnus. I suggest that the shelf, rather than being used to support other bronze statuettes, was only one part of the original wooden or brick lararium, which supported an object not included in the hoard.

A thematic link between the mouse and the god of sleep may provide a clue to the function of the shelf. The mouse is a nocturnally active animal, and the divinity a personification of the main nighttime activity of humans. It seems clear that the function of the shelf was to hold an oil lamp or candle to illuminate the household shrine. Lamps and candlesticks occur in several other lararium assemblages, and the small shelf from Augst is an appropriate size for either.⁴² If a low-value ceramic lamp illuminated the Augst lararium, the owners of the hoard probably did not bother to include it in the box. The Augst hoard is a rare instance of a bronze mouse statuette in a well-documented archaeological context. This context, as we shall see, is probably typical for mouse statuettes that were attached either directly to oil lamps or to similar furniture and equipment relating to lighting.

MICE ON LAMPS

Mice on ancient oil lamps are actually fairly common (figs. 11, 12), and it is most likely that the majority of the now-freestanding mice in museum collections once stood on lamps or on lampstands, candelabra, or other furniture relating to illumination. Appendices 2 and 3 list lamps of the Hellenistic, Republican, and Imperial periods that include plastic depictions of mice. Appendix 4 records seven plastic lamps in the shape of mice, while appendix 5 lists lids and wick covers. Most lids and wick covers are no longer associated with the lamps to which they were once attached. Their identification as lids is made certain by their circular bases, which sometimes include hinges (fig. 13a–c). On both lamp

³⁷ Kaufmann-Heinimann 1994, 64–5, pl. 56. On the entire ensemble, see Kaufmann-Heinimann 1987; 1998, 129–34. The mouse and other objects are now in the Römermuseum in Augst (inv. no. 1984.27187).

³⁸ Kaufmann-Heinimann 1994, 7–9, no. 4, pls. 7–9 (Mercury [ht. 9 cm] on a six-sided base with cock, turtle and goat, and coin slot); 28–9, no. 25, pls. 26, 27 (Hercules [ht. 9.7 cm]); 34–5, no. 31, pl. 31 (lar [ht. 9.8 cm; on base ht. 2.5 cm]); 58–9, no. 54, pl. 54 (base, with goat and cock, ht. 3.0 cm).

³⁹ Kaufmann-Heinimann 1998, 192.

⁴⁰ Kaufmann-Heinimann 1994, 26–7, no. 23, pl. 24–5.

⁴¹ *LLMC* 5(1):591–609 (esp. 607, nos. 42, 44–57), s.v. "Somnus" (Lochin).

⁴² Kaufmann-Heinimann 1998, 187, cat. nos. GF36 (Ma-thay, candlestands), GF72 (Avenches, candlestands), GF 81 (Poliez-Pittet, ceramic lamp and candelabrum), GF83 (lamp), GF87 (Arezzo, candelabra), GF102 (Sibari, candelabrum).



Fig. 9. The Augusta Raurica lararium hoard: (from left to right) lar, Somnus (originally mounted on the right side of the shelf), Hercules, Mercury on a thesaurus base, empty base for a Mercury statuette, shelf with mouse (S. Schencker).

lids and lamps, the mice are shown sitting near the fill hole or creeping up the spout toward the wick hole.

The existence of numerous mouse statuettes that are no longer attached to lamps is hardly surprising, especially when one considers how many ancient statuettes have lost their attributes and bases. Lamps or lamp lids that still retain their mouse attachments were generally cast as a single piece; it is quite likely that many of the mice that did not stay attached had simply been soldered on. Several ancient lamps with soldered attachments still in place (albeit not mice) are known.⁴³ If the mice were soldered onto bronze lamps, the connection would not have been strong and could easily melt or corrode away without leaving the slightest trace on either object. There is certainly no shortage of plain bronze oil lamps to which the many mice figurines might once have been attached. Alternatively, some of the mice might have been suspended next to lamps by chains attached to their tails or connected to large lampstands. The significance of mice on lighting devices will be considered shortly, but first, the connection with Apollo Smintheus must finally be laid to rest. The next section considers the geographic distribution and dating of both the mouse statuettes and lamps with mice.



Fig. 10. Detail of mouse (lgth. 3.0 cm) on shelf from the Augusta Raurica hoard (appx. 1, cat. no. 2) (S. Schencker).

THE DATING AND DISTRIBUTION OF BRONZE MICE AND LAMPS WITH MICE

In the case of freestanding mice, stylistic criteria alone are relatively unhelpful for dating purposes. The naturalistic style of the mice and the techniques used to produce them can be found from the Hellenistic

⁴³ Examples in the British Museum include a silver lamp with the soldered figure of baby Hercules strangling snakes (Bailey 1996, no. Q3567), and a depiction of Jupiter in an aedicula (Bailey 1996, no. Q3778).

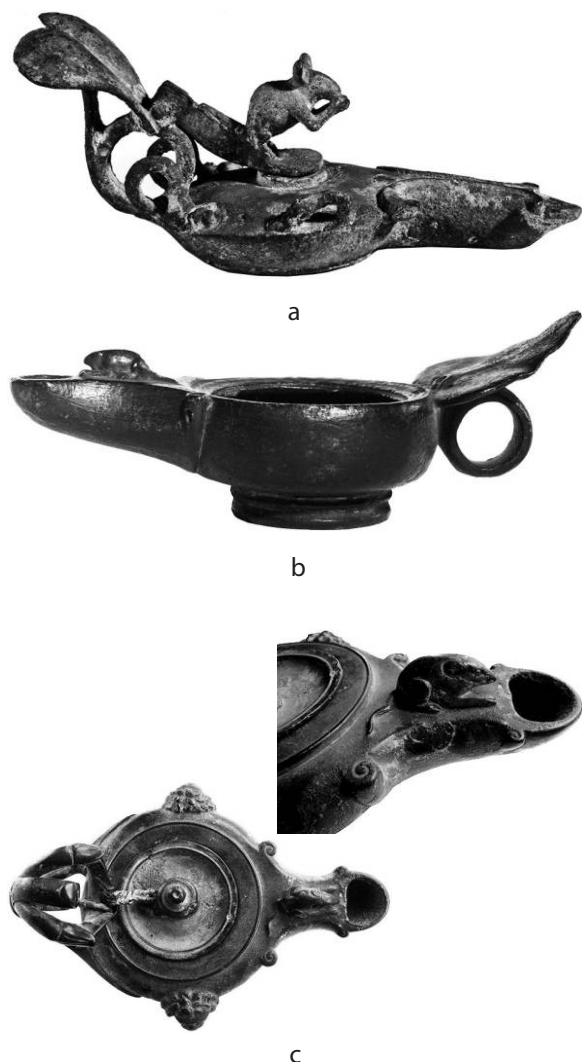


Fig. 11. Examples of bronze lamps with mice: *a*, lgth. 18.4 cm, Luxor, Egypt (appx. 2, cat. no. 6) (© The Trustees of the British Museum); *b*, lgth. 15.7 cm, Italy (appx. 3, cat. no. 4) (© The Trustees of the British Museum); *c*, lgth. unknown, Nîmes, France (appx. 3, cat. no. 6) (courtesy Musée Archéologique de Nîmes).

through the Late Roman periods. We must turn instead to those relatively rare examples with good archaeological contexts and the dates provided by the typology of those lamps with mice still attached to them.

Surprisingly, the earliest documented archaeological discovery of a bronze mouse was reported by Gregory of Tours and took place in the early sixth century C.E., when a drain was being cleaned in Paris

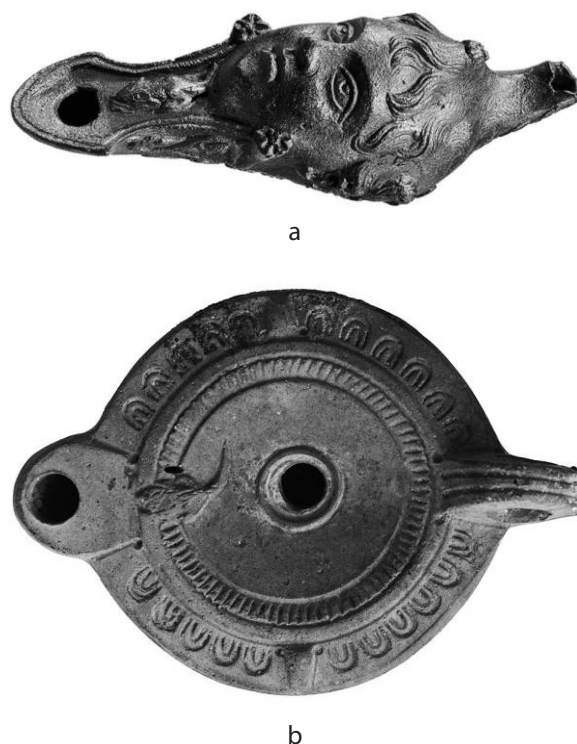


Fig. 12. Lamps with mice: *a*, plastic face lamp in bronze, lgth. 18 cm, Asia Minor (Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. no. Misc 8979; appx. 4, cat. no. 4) (J. Laurentius; courtesy Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung); *b*, ceramic lamp with mouse in relief, lgth. 10.8 cm, Pozzuoli (appx. 3, cat. no. 11) (© The Trustees of the British Museum).

and a bronze snake and mouse were found in it and removed. Shortly afterward, plagues of rats and snakes began to pester the houses and churches of the city.⁴⁴ Fortunately, more trustworthy modern excavations have also yielded mouse figurines in datable contexts. The earliest examples are from the final phase of the Menelaion in Sparta (appx. 1, cat. no. 11)—that is, the second to first centuries B.C.E.—and a Republican-period tomb at Sulmo (appx. 2, cat. no. 7), which was probably built in the first century B.C.E.⁴⁵ The form of the mouse from Sparta is rather unusual, with its tail wrapped around its body and a suspension loop attached to it. The mouse at Sulmo, however, is attached to a lamp and appears to be nearly identical to a bronze mouse from a burial context at York (appx. 1, cat. no. 23). A mouse on a lamp lid was found in Oberwinterthur (appx. 5, cat. no. 8) along with ceramic material

⁴⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* 8.33.

⁴⁵ On the Menelaion example, see van Wousterghem 1984,

237, fig. 321, no. 32.b. On the tomb in Sulmo (now in the Museo Civico di Sulmona), see de Nino 1892.

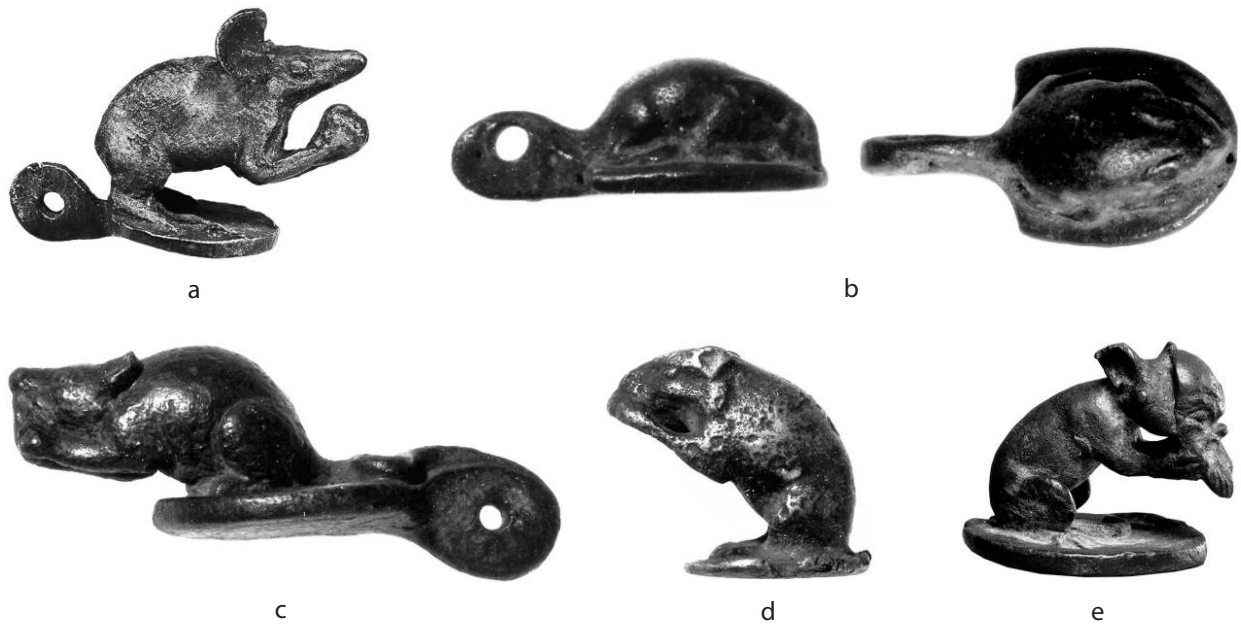


Fig. 13. Lamp lids with mouse attachments: *a*, ht. 2.6 cm (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. no. Misc. 6427; appx. 5, cat. no. 12); *b*, lgth. 3.6 cm (appx. 5, cat. no. 10); *c*, lgth. 5.5 cm, Naples/Pompeii (London, British Museum, inv. no. 1824.0454.22; appx. 5, cat. no. 7); *d*, ht. 3.4 cm (London, British Museum, inv. no. 1814.7–4.225; appx. 5, cat. no. 11); *e*, ht. 3.0 cm (London, British Museum, inv. no. 1876.0510.2) (*a*, J. Laurentius; courtesy Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung; *b–e*, © Trustees of the British Museum).

and a coin dating between 50 and 75 C.E. A mouse statuette found in the excavation of the Roman camp at Oberstimm (appx. 1, cat. no. 12; see fig. 3i) on the Danubian *limes* must have been lost during the fort's period of occupation (between the Claudian period and ca. 120 C.E.). Three lamps from Pompeii (appx. 3, cat. nos. 8–10) obviously have a terminus ante quem of 79 C.E. Of course, this date indicates only the moment at which these objects entered the ground, not their date of manufacture. As the hoard from Augst has shown, bronze statuettes could remain in use for hundreds of years. Unlike the freestanding statuettes, lamps with mice can be more accurately dated on the basis of established lamp typologies.

The earliest typologically datable example of a lamp with mouse decoration is a clay lamp lid from the Athenian Agora (appx. 5, cat. no. 1), which Howland placed between the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. on the basis of its glaze and fabric.⁴⁶ Of the nine Hellenistic and Republican-period lamps in appendix 2, three may be as early as the second or third century B.C.E. (appx. 2, cat. nos. 2, 6, 9). Bailey dates several

wick covers with mice to the first century B.C.E. or first century C.E.,⁴⁷ a range that seems to be confirmed by the intact example from the Sulmo tomb (appx. 2, cat. no. 7). The same date should probably be applied to a bronze mouse (almost certainly a wick cover) that found its way into the filling just above a late first- or early second-century C.E. amphora burial at York (appx. 1, cat. no. 23). Most bronze lamps and lids with mouse attachments, however, are variations of Loeschcke's Type 19,⁴⁸ which is normally dated to the first century C.E. Two Late Antique examples are also known. The first, now held in the British Museum, is a lamp lid (appx. 3, cat. no. 3) belonging to the sixth or the seventh century C.E. The body of the lamp bears a cross. The second example, a clamshell-shaped lamp lid (appx. 5, cat. no. 3) with a large mouse (or possibly a squirrel), comes from Banasa and has been attributed to the fourth or the fifth century C.E.

Thus, the period from the first century B.C.E. to the early second century C.E. seems to have been the floruit of the use of mice on lighting equipment, but the tradition goes back well into the Hellenistic period.

⁴⁶Howland 1958, 82, no. 364.

⁴⁷Bailey 1996, 51–4, nos. Q3733–6, Q3748–50.

⁴⁸Loeschcke 1919.

It is interesting to note that the mice on the earlier lamps and lids are generally larger and far more carefully articulated than those on later pieces, which are usually smaller and less detailed. The mouse in relief depicted crawling along the nozzle of a plastic face lamp in Berlin (appx. 4, cat. no. 4) and the mouse on a ceramic lamp from Pozzuoli (appx. 3, cat. no. 11) are both well under life-sized and are almost purely schematic representations (see fig. 12). It seems that the mouse image became a standardized or conventional motif for oil lamps by the late second century C.E.

The distribution of the bronze mice and lamps, summarized here in a map (fig. 14), shows a wide geographic range of findspots. Though they are not included on the map, it should be noted that many examples acquired by museums in the 19th century came from the collections of individuals who traveled and purchased antiquities in Italy.⁴⁹ The distribution of the mouse figurines and the lamps with mouse attachments provides the conclusive point against the Apollo Smintheus interpretation. While the cult was almost exclusive to the Troad, the lamps and mice are found throughout the Roman empire. A bronze lamp with a mouse in the collections of the İstanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri is thought to have come from Kastamonu (appx. 2, cat. no. 5),⁵⁰ and lamp lids with mice are known from Konya (appx. 5, cat. no. 6) and Cos (appx. 5, cat. no. 4), though both are somewhat different from the other bronze mice.⁵¹ Thus, bronze mice and lamps with mice are only rarely found in Asia Minor, the homeland of Apollo Smintheus. It is possible that this western bias in distribution is due to differences in the archaeological recording habits of different countries; if so, then the actual distribution of the mice is still universal and not limited to the sphere of the Apollo Smintheus cult. But if the mice are not attributes of Apollo Smintheus, what do they mean, and why were they attached to lamps?

MORE THAN JUST DECORATION: MICE ON LAMPS AND IN ANCIENT ART

While it is possible to see mouse attachments on lamps as merely decorative or, in the case of lids, as purely functional protrusions by which the lid could be gripped, their position on the lamps is far more striking when compared with that of other figural and decorative elements on lamps, including representations of other animals. Dolphins, ducks, and horses appear on lamps, but usually as skeuomorphs—where the natural shape of the animal is used to form the handle, body, or some functional element of the lamp that is a roughly similar shape.⁵² Thus, the handle of one lamp in the British Museum appears as a horse's head, with the bridle of the animal taking the form of the chain attached to the lamp lid.⁵³ On some handles, the animal head dips forward, as if the creature were going to drink from the reserve of the lamp, and the shape of the handle mimics the curved neck of a drinking animal.⁵⁴ Roman plastic lamps often employ the same artistic trick, taking the guise of roughly lamp-shaped objects, such as sandaled feet, birds, fish, masks, and faces.⁵⁵ Most decoration on bronze lamps consists of floral designs and patterns, but lion and mask protomes in low relief are also common. In these instances, one has the impression that the simple ornamentation is merely filling in blank space.⁵⁶ The mouse attachments are quite different, as they truly stick out of the lamp and confront the viewer far more directly than a skeuomorph or simple relief decoration.

References to mice in Greek and Roman literary texts reveal the special relationship between lamps and mice. The rodents were the subject of both ancient natural history and fiction. Their appearance is recorded as both a lucky and an unlucky omen, and their sexual appetite and capacity for hibernation are frequently commented on, as are swarms of mice destroying crops.⁵⁷ In addition, dormice were a Roman

⁴⁹E.g., an unpublished mouse in the British Museum (London, British Museum, inv. no. 1824.0454.21) is from the Payne Knight Collection but had previously belonged to William Hamilton, British envoy to Naples in the late 18th century and celebrated collector of antiquities. Similarly, four bronze mice in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional (Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, inv. nos. 3776–79) were purchased as part of the Salamanca Collection in 1873 but were said to have been originally purchased in Italy (Thouvenot 1927, 76). Finally, Stephani (1872, 52, no. 100) listed a bronze mouse among other bronzes from Pompeii and Herculaneum. At the time the pieces were published, it was in the Pavlovsk Palace in St. Petersburg.

⁵⁰Atasoy 2005, 1, no. 2.

⁵¹I have seen a bronze mouse on display in the Arkeoloji Müzesi in Bergama. Two bronze mice once on display in the Archaeological Museum in Çanakkale are in fact modern

copies (Mucznik and Ovadia 2001, 136 n. 19, figs. 7, 8).

⁵²E.g., Bailey 1996, nos. Q3675, Q3673–74, Q3671 (all with horse-head handles), Q3677 (with a duck-head handle).

⁵³Bailey 1996, 38, no. Q3667, pl. 46.

⁵⁴E.g., see Boube-Piccot 1975, 270–71, no. 464, pl. 199 (lion on tip of handle, drinking from the reserve); 336, no. 626, pl. 272 (handle shaped like a horse's head); Bailey 1996, no. Q3675 (horse-head handle).

⁵⁵For examples of plastic lamps in the form of feet, see Boube-Piccot 1975, 160, no. 187, pl. 94; Bailey 1996, nos. Q3586–89. For examples of birds, see Bailey 1996, nos. Q3600–7.

⁵⁶Examples of mask protomes include Bailey 1996, nos. Q3695, Q3698, Q3699 (masks), Q3641, Q3642, Q3651 (lions).

⁵⁷Keller 1909, 191–206; Beckman 1972; Toynbee 1973, 203–4. On their sexual appetite, see Ael., *NA* 12.10. On plagues

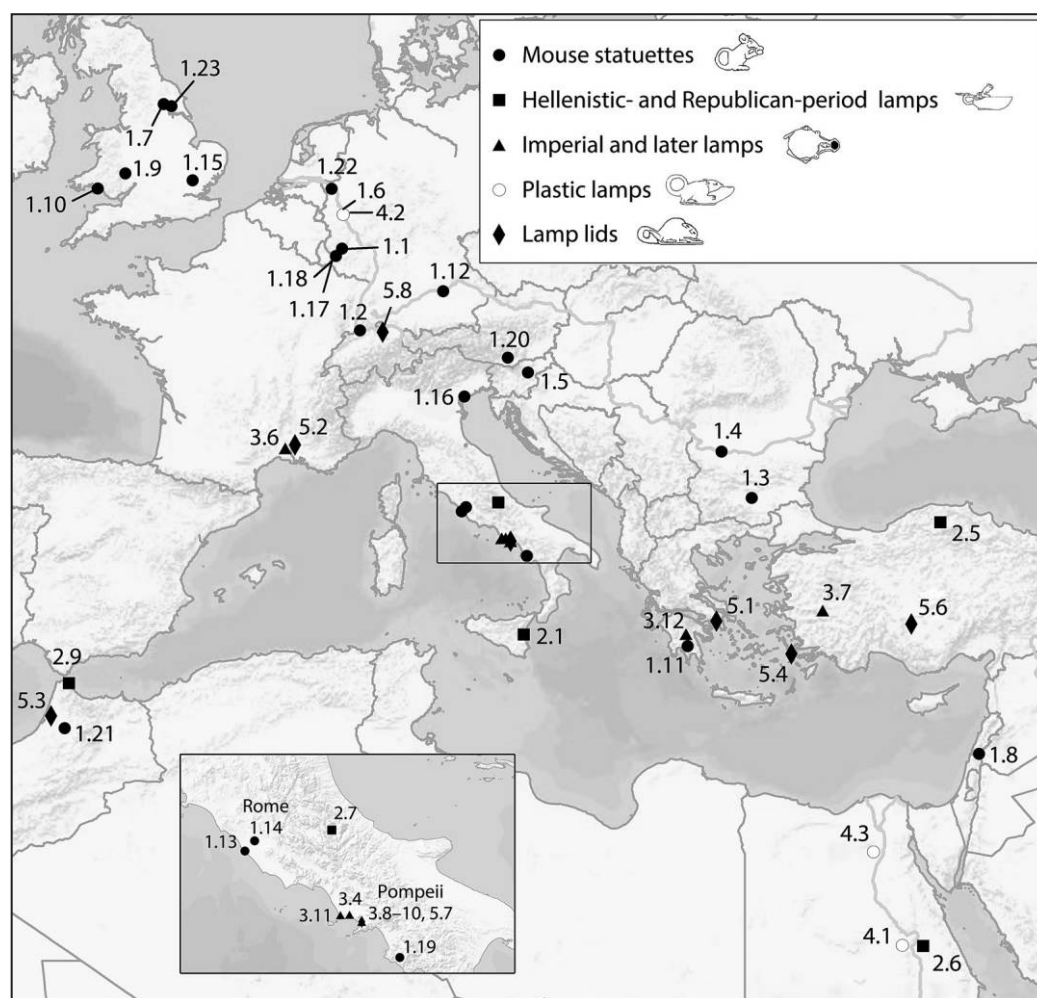


Fig. 14. Distribution map of bronze mouse statuettes, lamps, and lids with known findspots. Numbers correspond with appendix and catalogue numbers (e.g., 1.1 refers to appx. 1, cat. no. 1) (drawing by E. Warford).

delicacy that were specially bred and cooked for banquets, and it may be significant that the fat bodies of some of the bronzes resemble dormice.⁵⁸ Lamps were normally lit at night, and in this respect it may be worth recalling that mice are nocturnal animals. But the role of mice in ancient fiction allows for a far more interesting and relevant hypothesis.

In the pseudo-Homeric poem the *Batrachomyomachia* (The Battle of the Frogs and Mice), the characteristics and activities of fictional mice are described in detail. This short poem presents a light-hearted parody of

the *Iliad* in which the great heroes of the mice and frogs engage in an epic-style conflict that is watched and influenced by the gods. The surviving version of the story was almost certainly written in the first century C.E., but its subject matter is so similar to a fragmentary poem of the second or first century B.C.E., the *Galeomyomachia* (The Battle of the Weasel and the Mice), that it surely belongs to the same Hellenistic tradition.⁵⁹ The Augustan poet and fabulist Phaedrus writes that depictions of battles between mice and weasel could be found painted inside Roman taverns.⁶⁰

and showers of mice, see Ael., *NA* 2.56, 6.41, 17.41.

⁵⁸ Petronius (*Sat.* 31) describes dormice with honey and poppy seeds served at Trimalchio's banquet. Ammianus Marcellinus describes austerity measures against feasting on dormice (28.4.13), as well as the weighing of dormice at decadent

Roman banquets (27.4.13). Apicius (8.9) provides a recipe for their preparation. On breeding and other textual references, see Keller 1909, 191–93.

⁵⁹ West 2003, 229–31.

⁶⁰ Phdr. 4.6.

In both of the surviving poems, the dominant characteristic of the mice is their love of stealing human foodstuffs and their appropriation of human utensils for use in their small-scale world. The humor of the story lies in the gravity and seriousness with which the tiny mice partake in Homeric-style dialogues and actions, transforming day-to-day objects into the stuff of heroic action.⁶¹

First they fitted on greaves, breaking in half and fashioning well the green bean pods that they had set upon and gnawed in the night. They had corslets from straw-sewn hides that they had made skillfully after skinning a weasel. Their shield was the bronze bossed lid of a lamp; their spear a long needle, bronze work of the War god; and the helmet on their heads the husk of a chickpea.

The use of these mundane objects for epic battle fits the pattern of the humor of the poem, but ancient readers would have instantly recognized the significance of the lamp used as a shield. Further on in the poem, the mice stand ready for battle, and Zeus, looking down from Olympus, inquires of Athena which side she will support.⁶²

“Daughter, are you going to defend the mice? They are always skipping about your temple, enjoying the savor of the sacrificial meat and the eatables of every sort.” So said the son of Kronos, but Athena answered him “Father, I would never go to the mice in their distress; they have done me much harm, damaging my garlands and my lamps on account of the oil.”

In the modern world, where light comes at the flick of an electric switch and mice in the home are a relatively rare inconvenience, we are prone to neglect some of the basic realities of ancient life. The interest of the mice in Athena’s oil lamps—and in turn their connection to lamp lids—is the edible oil and wicks they contain. Mice were probably a standard feature of most Roman houses and could frequently be seen climbing over or upsetting oil lamps. The filling holes of some clay lamps are thought to have been made intentionally small to prevent mice from getting into

the oil reserve.⁶³ The mice depicted on oil lamps are thus represented crawling toward the lid or walking along the spout and reaching out to the place where the wick would be. In one sense, the bronze mice on lamp lids playfully reminded the viewer of the very function of the lid. Thus, the mice on Roman lamps and lamp lids were almost apotropaic in nature, warding off the real thing by replicating it.

This problem of mice and other animals eating wicks and lamp oil is earlier than the Hellenistic and Early Imperial literary traditions of mice and lasted much longer. At one end of the spectrum is a fifth-century B.C.E. Athenian red-figure pyxis lid in Berlin that depicts two boys with sticks chasing cats and mice that are eating oil from lamps and climbing up the sides of bronze lampstands.⁶⁴ At the other end, the issue was worked into Christian literary symbolism. Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022 C.E.) was able to employ lamp and mouse imagery in his 30th hymn.⁶⁵

My lamp burns brightly, it has an abundance of oil, and a long wick, but a mouse or some other animal has come and upset the lamp, or it has drunk the oil, with little licks licking it up little by little, it drinks the oil, eats the wick, and puts out the lamp.

The lamp and its oil were poetic metaphors for Symeon’s soul and virtues, while the mouse was a symbol of temptation.⁶⁶ The metaphor was possible because the problem of animals consuming oil and wicks from lamps was real and easily understood by Symeon’s readers. It is just possible that the mice depicted on Late Christian lamps referred directly to metaphors of this sort.

The very point of lamp lids and wick covers was to prevent such attacks by real rodents, and the placement of plastic depictions of mice on lamps recalls this fact. While it is possible that the bronze mice on lamps were intended to scare away living rodents or to serve as reminders to put the lamp lid back on, it is equally likely that the more plastic examples were meant as a *trompe l’oeil*, in which the viewer confused artistic representation and reality. A similar effect can be seen in the “unswept floor” mosaic (*asarotos oikos*)

⁶¹ *Batrachomyomachia* 122–29 (translation by West 2003, 275).

⁶² *Batrachomyomachia* 174–80 (translation by West 2003, 279–80).

⁶³ Howland 1958, 79.

⁶⁴ CVA Berlin, Antiquarium 3 (Deutschland 22), 22–3, pl. 137.6, no. F 2517. The pyxis lid is attributed to the Bologna Painter (*BAPD*, no. 21142; Seidel 2009, 28, fig. 3).

⁶⁵ Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymns* 30.62–70 (translation by the author).

tion by the author).

⁶⁶ My thanks to Deborah Kamen for locating this reference for me. Symeon does not seem to have invented the metaphor. It appears in prose form in a book of instructions for monks attributed to Johannes IV (John the Faster), patriarch of Constantinople (582–595 C.E.), with the mouse again representing a monk’s temptations. Johannes IV, *Ascticae Regulae* 26 (Pitra 1858, 426); see also Dauterman-Maguire et al. 1989, 58.

originally by Sosos of Pergamon but best known from a Roman copy by Herakleitos that is now in the Vatican.⁶⁷ Originally located around the couches of a Roman dining room, the mosaic shows the remains of a banquet scattered across the floor. In the dim, flickering lamp light, as the effects of the evening's wine made themselves apparent, the actual foodstuffs that had fallen to the floor would blur with their mosaic counterparts in the eyes of the banqueters. Among the foodstuffs, the unswept floor mosaic includes a representation of a little mouse that is eating a nut that has fallen from the table. In the flickering lamplight, the same confusion could be made between the bronze mouse statuettes, the shadows they cast, and the real living mice that plagued ancient lamps.

The practical problem of mice alone is a sufficient explanation for their presence on lamps, but there is also a direct connection between the literary "humanized" mice of Hellenistic texts such as the *Batrachomyomachia* and at least some of the bronze mice. One of the fragments of the Hellenistic poet Callimachus' *Aetia* describes how the protagonist of the poem is deprived of sleep by the noise of mice scurrying around his room. In an angry rant, he lists off the many crimes of the domestic pests, one of which is their penchant for raiding oil lamps:⁶⁸

Often they drew the fat oil from the lamp with their tails, and licked it when the lid was not in place.

A remarkable bronze wick cover in the British Museum (appx. 5, cat. no. 4; fig. 15), supposedly from the Greek island of Cos, shows a mouse committing exactly the crime described by Callimachus, licking its bronze tail. While no real mouse is likely to have used its tail in this way, the image combines the literary idea of mice as intelligent thieves of human goods and the reality of mice attacking lamps for the oil. Reports of human-like acts by animals could even escape the realm of popular mythology and enter more serious works on natural history. Thus, Aelian informs his readers that mice are in the habit of cooperating to rescue other mice that have fallen into storage jars and are unable to escape. In such an eventuality, Aelian claims, the mice form a living chain, with each mouse holding the tail of the next in its teeth to allow the trapped colleague to be pulled to safety.⁶⁹

It would not have escaped the reader's attention that many of the bronze mouse statuettes are shown

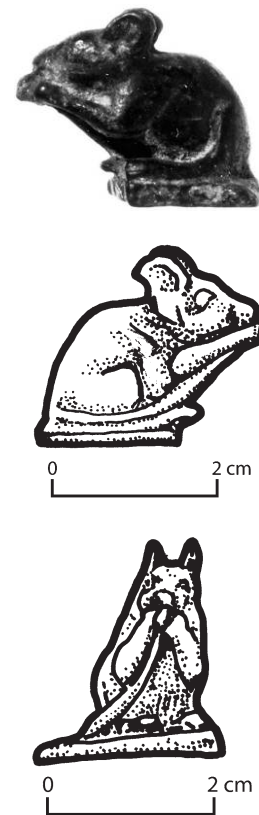


Fig. 15. Lamp lid supposedly from Cos, showing mouse licking its tail, ht. 2.4 cm (London, British Museum, inv. no. 1854.0519.54; appx. 5, cat. no. 4); (drawings by D. Bailey; © The Trustees of the British Museum).

eating crumbs or even tiny pieces of bread and as such can hardly be seen as eating the oil or wick directly. But this could be another example of transferring a human activity to mice. Note that in many cases, the piece of bread represented is a full round loaf, and not a mere crumb as in the Dresden example (see fig. 2a). Perhaps we are expected to apply a sort of human intelligence to the mice in such depictions as well. Could it be that these mice have climbed onto the lamp not to eat the oil directly but to actually dunk bread into it, just as a human would?

The proposed dunking of bread into the oil and the sort of rational use of the mouse's tail described by Aelian and Callimachus and illustrated by the lamp wick lid are instances of mice employing more intelligence than they really possess. In a broader sense, the

⁶⁷ Nogara 1910, 3–5, pls. 5–7; Dunbabin 1999, 26–7, fig. 26.

⁶⁸ Callim., *Aet.* 177.22–3 (translation by Trypanis 2004, 93).

⁶⁹ Ael., *NA* 5.22. Pliny (*HN* 8.55) describes a similar meth-

od used by marmots (*mures Alpini*, or "Alpine mice") to enter deep caves to hibernate.

comical motif of mice and other animals engaging in inappropriate or disproportionate actions is one that can be found elsewhere in Roman art and has been described as the “upside-down world” motif.⁷⁰ A wick-hole stopper in the British Museum shows a mouse holding a theatrical mask (appx. 5, cat. no. 6; see fig. 13e), while another mouse statuette in the same museum shows a mouse playing a trumpet.⁷¹ Two bronze statuettes in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris depict toga-clad mice standing erect, one of them holding a *rotulus* (papyrus roll) in its right paw. It has been suggested that these statuettes represent comic actors, but if they do, they are wearing highly unusual masks. The alternative explanation, that the mice represent Roman senators, seems more plausible.⁷² Dressed in this way, some of the very lowest members of the animal kingdom have joined the most dignified and powerful human elites of the ancient world.

Farther afield, numerous mass-produced ceramic lamps show mice outweighing elephants in scale pans, while several gems are known that depict a mouse driving a chariot pulled by birds.⁷³ A portion of a Roman mosaic floor in a house in Volubilis shows a cat labeled “Vincentius” killing a mouse labeled “Luxurius.” The scene appears to be a direct parody of the single-combat motifs found on many gladiatorial mosaics, where one named gladiator has defeated another.⁷⁴ The tail-licking mouse in the British Museum, and indeed the other bronze mouse statuettes, can be placed in this same category of art, in which normal roles are reversed and the unexpected becomes the norm.

A similar artistic genre of subjects undertaking inappropriate, unlikely, or even impossible activities is paralleled outside the realm of *Kleinkunst* and the world of animal imagery. The mouse senators in Paris, as well as the mouse with a theatrical mask and mouse blowing a trumpet in London, can all be compared to depictions of the infant Eroses, or putti, which begin to appear in the Hellenistic period and are frequently found on Roman sarcophagi. Many Roman sarcophagi show the Eroses in the guise of musicians, actors, gladiators, chariot racers, hunters, or smiths or show them participating in other daily-life activities. The popu-

larity of these scenes, simultaneously humorous and endearing, lies in the fact that the Eroses are childlike figures performing adult roles, often with tools that are far larger than they could realistically manage.⁷⁵

CONCLUSIONS

The connection between the common Graeco-Roman bronze mouse statuettes, such as the two in Dresden, and the Greek god Apollo Smintheus is entirely a modern invention, the result of an antiquarian desire to relate a particular type of artifact directly to the central work of classical literature. Most of these bronze mouse statuettes were connected to lamps, candelabra, or other pieces of furniture related to lighting. They belonged to the realm of domestic art and worked as a sort of artistic *trompe l'oeil*, mocking the real problem of mice eating the oil and wicks of lamps. Furthermore, the bronzes recalled literary and artistic perceptions of mice as cunning thieves in the minds of their viewers and played with humorous conventions of mice and other animals performing on the same level as humans. They are a striking example of imagery in Roman minor arts going far beyond the level of mere decoration and design.

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Appendix 1: Bronze Mouse Statuettes with Known Findspots

Catalogue Number: 1.

Museum and Inventory Number: Private collection.

Dimensions: Lgth. 4.1 cm.

Findspot: Altrich (Bernkastel-Wittlich), Germany. Found along with Roman walls, various metal implements, and coins from the second to fourth centuries C.E.

⁷⁰ On the inverted world in Roman art, see Kenner 1970. It is possible that this same inverted-world motif involving mice appears in a scene of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* (7.1) in which Hercules warns Claudius that he is in a place where “mice bite through steel,” though the passage has been interpreted in several ways. For a discussion, see Marcovich 1977.

⁷¹ Toynbee 1973, figs. 99, 100.

⁷² Babelon and Blanchet 1895, 433, nos. 984, 985. The best published illustrations are in Babelon 1928.

⁷³ Kenner 1970, 26–7, fig. 10; Bailey 1980, nos. Q832, Q833, pl. 63.

⁷⁴ Aymard 1961; Toynbee 1973, 90. A mosaic in another part of the same house depicts a chariot race in which the chariots are pulled by ducks and peacocks.

⁷⁵ *LIMC* 3(1):937–42, s.v. “Eros” (Hermay et al.); 1046–49, s.v. “Eros/amor, cupido” (Blanc and Gury). On sarcophagi with putti, see Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 212; Huskinson 1996, 105–7.

Description: Bronze mouse statuette with ancient pin below its hind legs. The mouse is standing upright and holding a round piece of bread between its front paws. The small tail is in relief flat against the mouse's body.
Reference: Faust 2004–2005, 173, no. 29.

Catalogue Number: 2 (see figs. 9, 10).

Museum and Inventory Number: Augst, Römermuseum Augst, inv. no. 1984.27187.

Dimensions: Lgth. 3.0 cm; ht. 2.1 cm; wt. 13 g.

Findspot: Augst (Augusta Raurica), Switzerland. Part of a hoard of bronzes from a lararium group buried in the mid third century C.E. beneath the floor of a house in region 17E of the city.

Description: The mouse is seated on its hind paws on the edge of a small bronze shelf, eating a circular piece of bread. On the opposite end of the shelf is a statuette of Somnus.

References: Kaufmann-Heinimann 1994, 64–5, pl. 56. On the entire ensemble, see Kaufmann-Heinimann 1987; 1998, 129–34.

Catalogue Number: 3.

Museum and Inventory Number: Sofia, National Institute of Archaeology with Museum in Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, inv. no. 1767.

Dimensions: Lgth. 5 cm; ht. 2.5 cm.

Findspot: Chirpan region, Bulgaria.

Description: A bronze mouse with a looped tail.

Reference: Ilieva 1994, 221, no. 9.

Catalogue Number: 4.

Museum and Inventory Number: Sofia, National Institute of Archaeology with Museum in Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, inv. no. 893.

Dimensions: Lgth. 8 cm; ht. 3 cm.

Findspot: Beshly, Orjahovo region, Bulgaria.

Description: Bronze mouse.

References: Künze 1989, 111, no. 53; Ilieva 1994, 221, no. 10.

Catalogue Number: 5.

Museum and Inventory Number: Celje Regional Museum.

Dimensions: Unknown.

Findspot: Celje (Celeia), Slovenia.

Description: Bronze mouse resting on its hind legs with its tail curled backward in a loop. It holds a disk-shaped crumb in its forepaws.

Reference: Kolšek 1993, 264, fig. 12.

Catalogue Number: 6.

Museum and Inventory Number: Bonn, Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn, inv. no. 1020.

Dimensions: Ht. 3.2 cm.

Findspot: Cologne (Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippina), Germany. Found in Cologne in the 19th century and purchased from H. Wolf.

Description: A mouse standing on a flat disk, around which its tail is wrapped. It chews on something indiscernible between its front paws. There are traces of a modern peg under the disk.

Reference: Menzel 1986, 66, no. 138, pl. 81.

Catalogue Number: 7.

Museum and Inventory Number: Portable Antiquities Scheme, inv. no. FASW-8B6455.

Dimensions: Lgth. 3.6 cm; width. 1.3 cm; ht. 2.5 cm; wt. 44 g.

Findspot: Hayton, East Yorkshire, England.

Description: A bronze mouse sitting on its hind legs and holding a circular loaf of bread in its forepaws. Its tail is broken, and traces of lead corrosion are visible under the lower legs.

References: Worrell and Pearce 2011, 407–8, fig. 4.

Catalogue Number: 8.

Museum and Inventory Number: Unknown.

Dimensions: Lgth. 6.9 cm; width. 2.4 cm; ht. 3 cm; wt. 120 g.

Findspot: Kedesh, Upper Galilee, Israel. Found in the temple area in a second- to fourth-century C.E. context.

Description: Solid cast bronze mouse standing on all four paws, which are flat underneath.

Reference: Mucznik and Ovadia 2001, figs. 1–5.

Catalogue Number: 9.

Museum and Inventory Number: Unknown. According to Wright, the statuette was in the private collection of W. Fenell of Wakefield, West Yorkshire, in 1852.

Dimensions: Unknown.

Findspot: Kenchester, Herefordshire, England.

Description: A bronze mouse resting on all four legs and chewing on a large circular object held in its forepaws.

Reference: Wright 1852, 126.

Catalogue Number: 10.

Museum and Inventory Number: Cardiff, National Museum of Wales, inv. no. 98.6/3.155.

Dimensions: Unknown.

Findspot: Loughor (Leucarum), West Glamorgan, Wales. Found in the excavation of the auxiliary fort, which was occupied from the late first to the early fourth century C.E.

Description: Bronze mouse with straight tail. It holds a disk-shaped piece of bread in its front paws.

Reference: Marvel and Owen-John 1997, 268–69, fig. 100.

Catalogue Number: 11.

Museum and Inventory Number: Unknown.

Dimensions: Unknown.

Findspot: Menelaion, Sparta, Greece. Found in a *favissa* in the terrace of the Temple of Menelaus and Helen in 1976. Probably datable to the first or second century B.C.E.—that is, the final phase of the temple's use.

Description: The mouse rests on all four legs. Its tail is wrapped around the middle of its body, forming a small loop at the top of the back, to which a free-moving ring is attached. Described as an amulet by Touchais.

Reference: Touchais 1977, 558, 560, fig. 98.

Catalogue Number: 12 (see fig. 3i).

Museum and Inventory Number: Munich, Archäologische Staatssammlung.

Dimensions: Lgth. 5.2 cm.

Findspot: Oberstimm, Germany. Found in excavations of the Roman fort on the Danube near Manching. The fort was built in the reign of Claudius and was occupied to 120 C.E.

Description: A bronze mouse resting on all four legs. Its tail is curved, and a round object is in its forepaws. The fur is indicated by short incised lines.

Reference: Schönberger 1978, 185, no. B412, pls. 29, 42.

Catalogue Number: 13.

Museum and Inventory Number: Ostia, Museo Archeologico Ostiense, inv. no. 3566.

Dimensions: Unknown.

Findspot: Ostia, Italy.

Description: A bronze mouse resting on all four legs with a flat tail.

References: Calza and Squarciapino 1962, 96; Bakker 2007.

Catalogue Number: 14.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1866.1229.49.

Dimensions: Lgth. 2.2 cm.

Findspot: Rome, Italy. Found in 1793 as part of the so-called Esquiline treasure, a hoard of silver objects datable to the late fourth or early fifth century C.E.

Description: A silver mouse standing on its hind legs, clutching in its forepaws an oval object on which it is chewing. The tail is looped, reconnecting on the right side of the mouse's back. The eyes and lines of the fur were engraved after casting. Identified by Shelton as a charm or a gaming piece but described in earlier literature on the hoard as part of a hairpin.

Reference: Shelton 1981, 93, no. 54, pl. 47.

Catalogue Number: 15 (see fig. 3a).

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1995.0903.1.

Dimensions: Ht. 2.1 cm; wt. 7.5 g.

Findspot: Stansted-Mountfitchet, Essex, England.

Found by a metal detectorist on farmland.

Description: A small silver mouse crouched on hind legs holding a circular piece of bread in its forepaws. The fur is indicated by short incised lines, and the tail is represented in relief, lying flat against the mouse's back and traveling up to between the two elongated ears. Traces of solder are visible on the mouse's underside and below the feet.

Reference: Unpublished. Information from R. Hobbs, pers. comm. 2010.

Catalogue Number: 16.

Museum and Inventory Number: Torcello, Il Museo di Torcello, inv. no. 1885.

Dimensions: Lgth. 4.4 cm; ht. 2.6 cm.

Findspot: Torcello, Italy. Found in an excavation near Borgognoni (Torcello) in 1882.

Description: A mouse sitting on its hind legs. It has large ears and oval eyes. Its tail is wrapped under its right hind leg, and it has a circular piece of bread in its forepaws.

References: Tombolani 1981, 103, no. 86; Fogolari 1993, 96, no. BR32.

Catalogue Number: 17 (see fig. 8a).

Museum and Inventory Number: None (private collection).

Dimensions: Lgth. 5.65 cm; wdth. 1.2 cm; ht. 2.3 cm.

Findspot: Trier, Germany. Found in Hubert-Neuerburg-Straße, Trier, during the construction of the new *Finanzamt*.

Description: Two mice with looped tails on a flat, rectangular base. The mice are sitting on their hind legs, facing one another and chewing the same round piece of bread.

Reference: Faust 2004–2005, 172, no. 27.

Catalogue Number: 18.

Museum and Inventory Number: None (private collection).

Dimensions: Lgth. 4.5 cm; ht. 2.1 cm.

Findspot: Trier, Germany. Found near St. Maximin in 1982.

Description: Bronze mouse statuette with ancient pin below hind legs. The mouse is chewing a small round crumb held in its front paws.

Reference: Faust 2004–2005, 172, no. 28.

Catalogue Number: 19.

Museum and Inventory Number: Parma, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Parma, inv. no. B.348.

Dimensions: Unknown.

Findspot: Veleia, Italy.

Description: A bronze mouse statuette with tail curled

back, sitting on its hind paws, arching its back, and chewing something indiscernible between its front paws. Its back toes are curled slightly downward.
Reference: d'Andria 1970, no. 30, pl. 17.

Catalogue Number: 20.

Museum and Inventory Number: Klagenfurt am Wörthersee, Landesmuseum für Kärnten.

Dimensions: Ht. 3.2 cm.

Findspot: Virunum, Austria. Stray find from the 1909–1910 excavations of a bath and temple.

Description: The mouse is sitting upright on its hind legs, with its tail lying flat along its back. It is chewing on an acorn held in its forepaws.

Reference: Fleischer 1967, 190, no. 275, pl. 130.

Catalogue Number: 21.

Museum and Inventory Number: Rabat, Musée de Rabat, inv. no. 889.

Dimensions: Unknown.

Findspot: Volubilis, Morocco. Found in 1940 in the northeast quarter of the city between the decumanus and the aqueduct.

Description: A bronze mouse standing on hind paws with a bunch of grapes. The tail is broken, but the tip remains on the mouse's back, indicating it was once curled in a loop.

Reference: Boube-Piccot 1975, 174, no. 209.

Catalogue Number: 22.

Museum and Inventory Number: Bonn, Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn, inv. no. 33748.

Dimensions: Lgth. 3.1 cm.

Findspot: Xanten, Germany. Found at the Roman fort and settlement at Xanten, but the exact findspot is unknown.

Description: A bronze mouse lying on a flat, rectangular base.

References: Lehner et al. 1930, 194; Menzel 1986, 66, no. 139, pl. 81.

Catalogue Number: 23.

Museum and Inventory Number: York, Yorkshire Museum, inv. no. YORYM:2006.2870.

Findspot: York, England. Found in the northwest corner of the Mount School grounds, where several Roman burials were uncovered in the early 20th century. The mouse was found above an amphora burial of the late first to the early second century C.E. and is thought to have been from a disturbed burial.

Description: The mouse is crouching on all four legs with its tail curled in a loop, and its fur is represented by numerous short engraved lines. It holds a roughly oval object in its forepaws. It is virtually identical to a

wick lid on a republican lamp from Sulmo (see appx. 2, cat. no. 7).

Reference: Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England 1962, 100b, pl. 34. Thanks to Natalie McCaul of the Yorkshire Museum for sending a working photograph.

Appendix 2: Hellenistic and Republican Lamps with Mice

Catalogue Number: 1.

Museum and Inventory Number: Catania, Museo Biscari, inv. no. 130.

Dimensions: Lgth. 9.6 cm.

Findspot: Catania(?), Italy.

Description: Bronze lamp with circular body, suspension ring, and rostrum with volutes. A small mouse is depicted in relief on its base.

Dating: First century B.C.E.

Reference: Libertini 1930, 131, no. 508.

Catalogue Number: 2.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1926.0415.41 (purchased in 1848). Ex H. Osborn Cureton and E.J. Andrews Collections.

Dimensions: Lgth. 15.9 cm; width. 7.0 cm; ht. 7.4 cm.

Findspot: Egypt(?).

Description: Bronze lamp with mouse sitting on hinged lid.

Dating: Third to second centuries B.C.E.

Reference: Bailey 1996, no. Q3548.

Catalogue Number: 3.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1963.7–25.17.

Dimensions: Lgth. 7.6 cm.

Findspot: Egypt.

Description: Clay lamp with deep body and truncated oval form. In front of the grip at the back of the lamp is a mouse in high relief facing the nozzle. The lamp is inscribed "MVS" on the base. Bailey thought the inscription was the name of the maker, with the mouse meant as a play on his name.

Dating: First century B.C.E.

Reference: Bailey 1975, no. Q680, pls. 2, 114.

Catalogue Number: 4.

Museum and Inventory Number: Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. no. 256311. Ex Betti Collection (inv. no. 1073).

Dimensions: Lgth. 13.5 cm; ht. 4.3 cm.

Findspot: Italy(?).

Description: Bronze lamp with two lion protomes, one on each side. The mouse has a flat tail and is on the nozzle directly before the spout.

Dating: Hellenistic(?).

Reference: de Spagnolis and De Carolis 1983, 16–17, 20, 29, no. 2.14.

Catalogue Number: 5.

Museum and Inventory Number: Istanbul, İstanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri.

Dimensions: Lgth. 19.3 cm; wdth. 10 cm; ht. 6.5 cm.

Findspot: Kastamonu, Turkey. Found in 1897.

Description: A bronze lamp with high base, long nozzle, and mouse crawling along the nozzle toward the wick hole. The mouse has a straight tail. There is a ringed handle with a leaf-shaped attachment at the back of the lamp.

Dating: Late Hellenistic.

Reference: Atasoy 2005, 1, no. 2.

Catalogue Number: 6 (see fig. 11a).

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1926.0415.54.

Dimensions: Lgth. 18.4 cm; wdth. 8.7 cm; ht. 7.9 cm.

Findspot: Luxor, Egypt. Purchased in 1919 from a Luxor dealer.

Description: Shallow bronze lamp with handle; the mouse sits on its sloped hinged lid, eating a crumb. Suspension loops are present on the sides of the lamp in the form of duck heads.

Dating: Second century B.C.E.

Reference: Bailey 1996, no. Q 3549.

Catalogue Number: 7.

Museum and Inventory Number: Sulmona, Museo Civico di Sulmona.

Dimensions: Unknown.

Findspot: Sulmo, Italy. Found in a Republican-period (first-century B.C.E.) tomb along with various other bronze objects in 1891.

Description: Bronze lamp with a leaf-shaped handle and round body. The hinged lid is surmounted by a dog(?), while the wick lid is a hinged mouse.

Dating: First century B.C.E.

References: de Nino 1892; van Wouterghem 1984, 237, fig. 321, no. 32.b.

Catalogue Number: 8.

Museum and Inventory Number: Tétouan, Musée d'archéologie à Tétouan.

Dimensions: Lgth. 16 cm; wdth. 7.8 cm; ht. 6.8 cm.

Findspot: Tamuda, Morocco.

Description: Plastic bronze lamp in the form of a satyr mask. A solid cast mouse stands directly in front of the

wick hole, paws raised to its mouth, which Boube-Piccot describes as holding a fruit.

Dating: Tamuda was destroyed by the Romans in 40 C.E. and then occupied by a Roman camp. Boube-Piccot dates the lamp to the preconquest (Hellenistic) period of Tamuda.

Reference: Boube-Piccot 1975, 107–8, no. 89, pl. 37.

Catalogue Number: 9.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1867.0508.386. Ex Louis/Pierre Duc de Blacas d'Aulps Collections.

Dimensions: Lgth. 11.3 cm; wdth. 6.5 cm.

Findspot: Unknown.

Description: Bronze lamp with deep rounded body, long narrow nozzle, and mouse facing the wick hole.

Dating: Third to second centuries B.C.E.

References: Walters 1899, no. 103; Bailey 1996, no. Q3543.

Appendix 3: Roman Imperial Period and Later Lamps with Mice

Catalogue Number: 1.

Museum and Inventory Number: Bari, Museo Archeologico Provinciale di Bari, inv. no. 6562. Ex Collection Polese.

Findspot: Central Apulia, Italy.

Dimensions: Lgth. 11.5 cm; ht. 4.5 cm.

Description: Bronze lamp with a curved handle terminating in a duck's head. Directly in front of the handle, on the body of the lamp, is a mouse with a flat tail, its nose extending just over the rim of the filling hole.

Dating: Probably first century C.E. (cf. Bailey 1996, nos. 3630, 3703).

Reference: Montanari 1970, 79, no. 298, pl. 47.

Catalogue Number: 2.

Museum and Inventory Number: Cairo, Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, inv. no. 27.769.

Findspot: Egypt.

Dimensions: Unknown.

Description: Bronze lamp with round, volute body and flat handle. Masks are depicted in relief on either side of the body. The mouse is on the nozzle advancing toward the wick hole; its tail lies flat behind it.

Dating: First century C.E. (cf. Bailey 1996, no. Q3641).

Reference: Edgar 1904, 35, no. 27769, pl. 11.

Catalogue Number: 3.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. MLA 1875.10–12.14.

Dimensions: Lgth. 14.2 cm; wdth. 5.8 cm.

Findspot: Egypt.

Description: Bronze lamp with volutes on either side of the nozzle, ending in birds' heads. The mouse is riveted into the extension of the hinged lid, which not only covers the discus but runs along the spout.

Dating: Sixth to seventh centuries C.E.

Reference: Bailey 1996, 69, no. Q3795 MLA, pl. 80.

Catalogue Number: 4 (see fig. 11b).

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1824.0454.13. From the Payne Knight Bequest.

Dimensions: Lgth. 15.2 cm; wdth. 6.7 cm.

Findspot: Italy (Naples?).

Description: Bronze lamp with shallow, bowl-shaped body and ring grip with leaf-shaped attachment. The mouse lies on the volute nozzle facing the wick hole; its tail runs flat on the nozzle and body.

Dating: First century C.E.

References: Walters 1899, no. 69; Bailey 1996, no. Q3620, pl. 27.

Catalogue Number: 5.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1814.0704.205. From the Townley Collection.

Dimensions: Lgth. 15.7 cm; wdth. 10.4 cm.

Findspot: Italy(?).

Description: Bronze lamp with lion masks on both sides. The mouse is lying on the nozzle, facing the wick; its tail is flat, and no crumb is visible.

Dating: First century C.E.

References: Walters 1899, no. 62; Bailey 1996, no. Q3641, pls. 33, 182.

Catalogue Number: 6 (see fig. 11c).

Museum and Inventory Number: Nîmes, Musée Archéologique de Nîmes.

Dimensions: Unknown.

Findspot: Nîmes, France.

Description: Bronze lamp with volutes and two lion protomes. On its nozzle, a mouse is depicted crawling toward the wick hole, its tail lying flat.

Dating: First century C.E. (cf. Bailey 1996, no. 3641; Loeschcke 1919 [Type 19]).

Reference: Perrot and Ménard 1836, 115, fig. 30.

Catalogue Number: 7.

Museum and Inventory Number: Athens, Société Archéologique d'Athènes, inv. no. 1141.

Dimensions: Lgth. 4 cm; wdth. 1 cm; ht. 1.5 cm.

Findspot: Philadelphia (Alaşehir), Turkey.

Description: Bronze lamp with mouse.

Dating: Probably Roman.

Reference: de Ridder 1894, 181, no. 980.

Catalogue Number: 8.

Museum and Inventory Number: Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico di Napoli, inv. no. 72172.

Dimensions: Lgth. 20.5 cm; wdth. 9.5 cm; ht. 8.5 cm.

Findspot: Pompeii, Italy.

Description: Bronze lamp with mouse on the nozzle approaching the wick hole. Its tail is flat.

Dating: First century C.E. (cf. Loeschcke 1919 [Type 19]).

Reference: Mele 1983, no. 122.

Catalogue Number: 9.

Museum and Inventory Number: Pompeii, Antiquarium di Pompei, inv. no. 1305.

Dimensions: Lgth. 15.6 cm; diam. 6.5 cm; ht. 4.1 cm.

Findspot: Pompeii, Italy. Regio IX Insula VII.9. Found in 1912.

Description: Bronze lamp with a rudimentary mouse on its nozzle approaching the wick hole, its tail lying flat.

Dating: First century C.E.

Reference: de Spagnolis and De Carolis 1988, 231, 233, no. 146.

Catalogue Number: 10.

Museum and Inventory Number: Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico, inv. no. 118351.

Dimensions: Lgth. 16.3 cm; wdth. 6.8 cm; ht. 7.5 cm.

Findspot: Pompeii, Italy.

Description: Bronze lamp with mouse lying on spout near the nozzle.

Dating: First century C.E. (Loeschcke 1919 [Type 19]).

Reference: Mele 1983, 67, no. 148.

Catalogue Number: 11 (see fig. 12b).

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1856.12–26.517.

Dimensions: Lgth. 10.8 cm; wdth. 7.9 cm.

Findspot: Pozzuoli(?), Italy.

Description: A ceramic lamp with a relief depiction of a mouse crawling toward the nozzle.

Dating: 100–150 C.E. (Loeschcke 1919 [Type 8]).

Reference: Bailey 1980, no. Q1246, pl. 63.

Catalogue Number: 12.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1905.1024.4. Purchased in 1905 from J. Kondylis.

Dimensions: Lgth. 18.4 cm; wdth. 10.7 cm.

Findspot: Tripolitza, Arcadia, Greece. Found in a tomb.

Description: A bronze double-nozzled lamp with two mice on opposite ends, approaching the wick holes.

Broken suspension loops extend from the backs of the mice.

Dating: First century C.E.

Reference: Bailey 1996, no. Q3651, pl. 39.

Appendix 4: Plastic Lamps

Catalogue Number: 1.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1922.0712.10. Ex Fouquet Collection.

Dimensions: Lgth. 9.0 cm; wdth. 3.1 cm.

Findspot: Armant, Egypt.

Description: Bronze plastic lamp in the form of a mouse or squirrel with a curled tail. The nozzle appears between the animal's paws and is decorated with a sheath of wheat on its side.

Dating: First century C.E.

Reference: Bailey 1996, no. Q3594, pl. 18.

Catalogue Number: 2.

Museum and Inventory Number: Cologne, Römisch-Germanisches Museum, inv. no. Lū 675.

Dimensions: Lgth. 8.5 cm; wdth. 2.6 cm.

Findspot: Cologne, Germany(?). Former Lückger Collection, thus probably from Cologne.

Description: A clay plastic lamp in the form of a mouse. The curved tail creates the handle, while the mouse holds the nozzle in its front paws, just in front of its mouth. A fill hole pierces the mouse's back, and there is a loop just behind its head, either for suspension or so a stopper could be attached on a chain or string.

Dating: Roman Imperial period.

Reference: Möhring 1989, 821, no. 23, fig. 26.

Catalogue Number: 3.

Museum and Inventory Number: Ann Arbor, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, inv. no. 0000.00.4964.

Dimensions: Lgth. 5.6 cm; wdth. 3.5 cm; ht. 4.3 cm.

Findspot: Fayum, Egypt.

Description: Ceramic lamp, the top half of which takes the form of a mouse with its nose just above the wick hole. The filling hole is offset slightly so as to be located just next to the body of the mouse. The broken tail of the mouse may well have formed the lamp's handle.

Dating: Roman Imperial period.

Reference: Dauterman-Maguire et al. 1989, 78, no. 24.

Catalogue Number: 4 (see fig 12a).

Museum and Inventory Number: Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. no. Misc. 8979.

Dimensions: Lgth. 18 cm.

Findspot: Turkey/Asia Minor. Acquired by the museum from a participant in the Zincirli (Syria) Expedition

of F. von Luschan (1888–1911), who likely obtained it in Turkey.

Description: A bronze plastic face lamp with a mouse crawling toward the nozzle. The mouse is a relatively crude depiction and seems to have been cast as part of the lamp.

Dating: Roman Imperial period.

Reference: Unpublished.

Catalogue Number: 5.

Museum and Inventory Number: Jerusalem, Hebrew University, Institute of Archaeology. Ex Schloessinger Collection.

Findspot: Unknown.

Dimensions: Lgth. 7.6 cm; ht. 4 cm.

Description: A brown clay lamp with flat base and two wick holes; the top half of the lamp forms a mouse. Its head appears to approach one of the holes. The filling hole of the lamp is at the back of the mouse's body.

Dating: Roman Imperial period.

Reference: Rosenthal and Sivan 1978, 149, no. 618.

Catalogue Number: 6.

Museum and Inventory Number: St.-Germaine-en-Laye, Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, inv. no. 12496. Donated by Napoleon III, who obtained it in Charvet in 1870.

Dimensions: Lgth. 10.7 cm.

Findspot: Unknown.

Description: A bronze plastic hanging lamp in the form of a mouse; its curled tail forms the grip with the nozzle directly in front of the mouse's nose.

Dating: Roman Imperial period.

Reference: Reinach 1984, 352, no. 475.

Catalogue Number: 7.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. MLA 1982.10–5.2.

Dimensions: Lgth. 8.1 cm.

Findspot: Unknown, but form suggests it is from the Greek East.

Description: Plastic clay lamp in stylized form of a mouse.

Dating: Fifth century C.E.

Reference: Bailey 1996, no. Q3314, pl. 123.

Appendix 5: Lamps Lids and Wick Covers with Mice

Catalogue Number: 1.

Museum and Inventory Number: Athens, Museum of the Ancient Agora, inv. no. L 4635.

Dimensions: Lgth. 6.7 cm; wdth. 2.6 cm; ht. 1.8 cm.

Findspot: Athens Agora, Greece.

Description: Wedge-shaped lamp lid in Attic clay, with black glaze and with a mouse in high relief on the top. The tail is outstretched, and a small hole through the back of the mouse allows it to be attached to the lamp with string. A beta was incised next to the tail of the mouse before firing.

Dating: The clay and glaze suggest a date of the fourth or third century B.C.E.

Reference: Howland 1958, 82, no. 364.

Catalogue Number: 2.

Museum and Inventory Number: Avignon, Musée Calvet d'Avignon, inv. no. J 196. Ex Calvet Collection, donated to the museum in 1810.

Dimensions: Lgth. 3.8 cm; ht. 1.4 cm.

Findspot: Avignon, France.

Description: A solid cast mouse lying on a bronze disk. Clearly a wick-hole lid, although not identified as such by Rolland.

Dating: First century C.E. or earlier.

References: *RSGR* 4:547, no. 1; Rolland 1965, 129, no. 264.

Catalogue Number: 3.

Museum and Inventory Number: Rabat, Musée de Rabat, inv. no. B-1269.

Dimensions: Ht. 5 cm; cover 4.5 x 4.1 cm.

Findspot: Banasa, Morocco.

Description: Hinged lamp lid in the form of a shell surmounted by a rodent, mouse, or squirrel chewing a nut.

Dating: Fourth to fifth centuries C.E.

Reference: Boube-Piccot 1975, 282–83, no. 480, pl. 212.

Catalogue Number: 4.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1854.0519.54. Ex Charles Thomas Newton (1816–1894).

Dimensions: Wdth. 2.2 cm; ht. 2.4 cm.

Findspot: Cos(?), Greece.

Description: A circular bronze wick-hole cover, one side of which is damaged, on which a mouse sits holding its tail between its front paws.

Dating: First century C.E., possibly earlier.

Reference: Bailey 1996, no. Q3734.

Catalogue Number: 5.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1814.0704.226. Ex Edward Towneley Collection.

Dimensions: Lgth. 3.6 cm; wdth. 2.2 cm.

Findspot: Italy(?).

Description: Oval bronze wick-hole lid with a mouse on top, its tail forming the hinge. A modern hole for the attachment of the object to a stand is visible on the underside.

Dating: First century B.C.E.

Reference: Bailey 1996, no. Q3748, pl. 63.

Catalogue Number: 6.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1876.0519.2.

Dimensions: Ht. 3.2 cm.

Findspot: Konya, Turkey(?).

Description: Circular bronze wick-hole lid with small notch and rivet in rim. A mouse stands on top of the lid holding a Papposilenos mask.

Dating: First century C.E.

Reference: Bailey 1996, 52–3, no. Q3733, pl. 63.

Catalogue Number: 7 (see fig. 13c).

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1824.0454.22. Ex Payne Knight, who acquired it from William Hamilton, British ambassador in Naples.

Dimensions: Lgth. 5.5 cm.

Findspot: Naples (probably Pompeii), Italy.

Description: Bronze lamp lid with hinge and a mouse crouching forward.

Dating: First century C.E., possibly earlier.

References: Walters 1899, no. 1859; Bailey 1996, no. Q 3736.

Catalogue Number: 8.

Museum and Inventory Number: Zürich, Kantonsarchäologie Zürich, inv. no. Fundnr. 5769.1.

Findspot: Winterthur, Oberwinterthur, Switzerland.

Found in 1981 in the excavation of a Roman *vicus* along with pottery and other finds dating to 50–75 C.E.

Description: Bronze mouse resting on all four legs on top of a roughly rectangular base. The base curves up slightly at the back of the mouse. Mouse is hollow and filled with lead. It was identified as a weight by Kaufmann-Heinimann, but the form of the base is strongly suggestive of a hinged lamp lid.

Dating: First century C.E.

Reference: Kaufmann-Heinimann 1994, 65, no. 68, pl. 56.

Catalogue Number: 9.

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1975.0501.2.

Dimensions: Lgth. 3.2 cm; wdth. 2.0 cm.

Findspot: Unknown.

Description: A bronze wick-hole lid. Mouse is lying on top of a flat, ovoid lid, its tail forming the hinge.

Dating: First century B.C.E.

Reference: Bailey 1996, no. Q3749, pl. 63.

Catalogue Number: 10 (see fig. 13b).

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1975.0501.3.

Dimensions: Lgth. 3.3 cm; wdth. 1.8 cm.

Findspot: Unknown.

Description: Bronze wick-hole lid. Mouse is lying on top of flat, ovoid lid, its tail forming the hinge.

Dating: First century B.C.E.

Reference: Bailey 1996, no. Q 3750, pl. 63.

Catalogue Number: 11 (see fig. 13d).

Museum and Inventory Number: London, British Museum, inv. no. 1814.7-4.225.

Dimensions: Diam. of lid 2.9 cm; ht. 3.4 cm.

Findspot: Unknown.

Description: A circular bronze lamp lid with mouse on top nibbling a visible crumb.

Dating: First century C.E., possibly earlier.

Reference: Bailey 1996, no. Q 3735, pl. 63.

Catalogue Number: 12.

Museum and Inventory Number: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. no. Misc. 6427. Acquired in 1874.

Dimensions: Lgth. 3.7 cm; ht. 2.6 cm.

Findspot: Unknown.

Description: Hinged wick-hole lid with finely modeled mouse standing on it.

Dating: Hellenistic to first century C.E. (cf. Bailey 1996, no. Q3459).

Reference: Unpublished.

Catalogue Number: 13.

Museum and Inventory Number: Bonn, Akademische Kunstmuseum der Universität Bonn, inv. no. C317. Gift of Bullinger prior to 1935.

Dimensions: Lgth. 4.8 cm; wdth. 1.8 cm; ht. 3.8 cm.

Findspot: Unknown.

Description: A bronze mouse crouching on its hind legs on an oval base, holding a circular piece of bread in its forepaws. Its tail is broken. Franken suggested the mouse was part of an instrument's grip that was sawn off in the post-Antique period, but it seems more likely it is a lamp lid or stopper. A modern hole has been drilled into the underside of the base.

Dating: Roman Imperial period.

Reference: Franken 1998, 60, no. 6, fig. 7.

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