

## COLLECTING THE COLLECTORS

V. NØRSKOV: *Greek Vases in New Contexts. The Collecting and Trading of Greek Vases—An Aspect of the Modern Reception of Antiquity*. Pp. 407, ill. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2002. Cased. ISBN: 87-7288-886-5.

This is a book about collecting in more ways than perhaps the author imagined. Developed from a master's thesis concerned with the Greek vases sold on the post-war art market, the project has now expanded to consider the buyers of those vases. As such, it presents an impressive amount of detailed information of post-war collections. The book is very well presented with a large number of colour plates and graphs, giving statistics of all aspects of museum acquisition. In addition to the long text there are three appendices containing interviews with museum curators and detailing the numbers and prices of vases sold in the last fifty years. The bibliography also includes a separate list of all the auction and gallery catalogues that contain Greek vases.

The introduction of the book lays out N.'s aim. This is not an analysis of the reception of vases in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Despite this, another two lengthy chapters on the history of vase collections intervene before we finally reach the twentieth century. A little pruning might have taken place here. These chapters become a little bogged by narrative until the book moves onto a much more engaging survey of debates on the ethics of collecting and acquisition (pp. 103–111).

The main body of the text, a history of public vase collections, begins at Chapter 4 with a justification of the selection of eight collections: the British Museum, National Museum in Copenhagen, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Carlsberg Glyptotek, Antiken-museum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, Ashmolean Museum, Antikensammlung in Kiel, and the Duke Classical Collection (North Carolina). These institutions represent different types of collection and the chapter takes each in turn, examining their history of acquisitions and display techniques. In Chapter 5 the book moves on to present a similarly statistically rich overview of the antiquities market, looking at the major sales of the last fifty years.

The book closes with a long 'conclusion' that also introduces a body of new material on private collections. The conclusion perhaps needed teasing out as the introduction of new material leaves little room to tie the many threads of the volume together. In fact, this would probably be the biggest criticism of the book. The sections of sustained argument are by far the briefest, with statistical analysis taking precedence. The reader should bear in mind that although statistics look authoritative, they are inevitably interpretative (N. warns us that she has not seen the register of the British Museum). Perhaps inevitably in a book of this size and scope, there are several sections where potentially interesting and complex issues have to be pushed aside. So, for example, the impact of the emergence of the Greek collector in the mid-twentieth century could be further explored. The book ends up exemplifying some of the problems it sees in collections. What warrants display/a photograph? What should end up in the basement/footnote? And to what extent should the curator/author guide the visitor's experience?

In the course of the book, N. considers and gives clarity to many familiar issues of ownership and collecting. Although ostensibly about Greek vases, the book will also introduce the student reader to major, related issues: the fetish for Cycladic figurines, fakes and forgeries, and the status of cast collections. In exploring these issues, N.

seems careful not to alienate potential collecting readers. She also reminds academic readers, who may be rather horrified at the attitude of some of the collectors (both individual and institutional) mentioned here, that they cannot consider themselves completely removed from the art market. In the conclusion, N. warns us that academic shifts of interest and growing disdain for collectors over the last thirty years have actually contributed to uncontrolled collecting. The art market, locked in a 'Beazleyian' framework, finds itself increasingly at odds with and thus released from the preoccupations of the academy.

In a way, the book ends up highlighting one of its own problems, the disjunction between the scholar, the museum and the private collector. Although the conclusion tries to bring these together, it does not have space to get very deeply into the concerns of the academy and wider, cultural and philosophical ideas of the collection, though it flirts with both these aspects. On the other hand, N. does attempt to get beyond these divisions, talking money, acquisition, and contemporary reception of antiquity, addressing topics which academics are often loath to do. It is clearly a monumental, cherished project, containing a great deal of useful material—a true collection of collecting.

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SHELLEY HALES

## A HUMANIST'S MINI-ODYSSEY

C. MECKELNBORG, B. SCHNEIDER: *Odyssea: Responsio Ulixis ad Penelopen. Die humanistische Odyssea decurtata der Berliner Handschrift Diez. B Sant. 41. Eingeleitet, herausgegeben, übersetzt und kommentiert.* (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 166.) Pp. x + 190. Munich and Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2002. Cased, €80. ISBN: 3-598-77715-9.

This curious poem was first discovered some twenty years ago by Dr Ursula Winter in the process of cataloguing the Diez MSS. It is now accorded the honour of this full-scale critical edition with translation and commentary. The attribution in the MS to 'Angelum Sabinum vatem egregium' is conclusively shown by the editors to be false; all that can be confidently asserted is that the text was copied—too carelessly for him to have been the author—by one Fatius around 1470. As a by-product of their enquiry, the editors discuss the authorship of the three replies to *Heroides* 1, 2, and 5, generally and, as they show, correctly ascribed to the humanist Angelus Sabinus. The ascription, revived as recently as 1996, to Ovid's friend Sabinus is firmly and, one hopes, finally knocked on the head.

The poem comprises 480 elegiac verses, purporting to be an answer to the Ovidian Penelope's letter but consisting for the most part of a résumé, by a narrator dodging uneasily between first and third person, of Ulysses' exploits and adventures. The poet does not appear to have been acquainted even with the Latin versions of the *Odyssey* available at the time, let alone Homer himself. His sources were the Latin poets, principally Virgil and Ovid, with occasional resort to Boccaccio's *Genealogie Deorum*. The result is a cento, a patchwork of phrases culled from the author's wide reading and tailored with varying degrees of success to their new contexts. The best that can be said of the writing is that it is fluent, the work of someone who really knew his texts. In its way, then, a *tour de force*, but as the editors remark, it is less as literature that it merits

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