

Abigail Baker. *Troy on Display: Scepticism and Wonder at Schliemann's First Exhibition* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021, viii+ 280pp., 40 b/w figs, pbk, ISBN 9781350191365)

Heinrich Schliemann took great pride and delight in the London exhibition of his Trojan collection, which was shown at the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) from 1877 to 1880. He gleefully seized the opportunity to display the finds from his famous (and controversial) excavations at Troy and spent considerable time supervising the arrangement of the exhibition to his own satisfaction. He clearly felt that this was the chance to show to the world the archaeology of Troy as he saw it; and, to his mind, there was no other way that it could or should be seen. Here, he could confound his detractors, whom he viewed as mortal enemies; here, he could gain the acceptance of the learned world of London that, as an autodidact outsider, he particularly craved, and, here, not least, he could enjoy the limelight in front of the large public audiences that the exhibition attracted.

The fascinating story of the exhibition is told by Abigail Baker in this penetrating study. Framing it within the intellectual and wider preoccupations of the time, she evokes the exhibition itself in considerable detail, then considers reactions and responses to it, and its legacy. The central focus of her work is an attempt to recreate the layout of the exhibition, the groupings and arrangement of the material within the showcases, and the interpretative materials—texts, maps, plans and photographs—that were included in the display. This is a highly original approach. A number of histories of museums and their permanent displays have been written, but it is rare indeed to find so detailed a study of a temporary exhibition, and particularly of one that took place almost 150 years ago.

While acknowledging that her reconstruction cannot be complete, and also that it is difficult to recreate in words the actual experience of the exhibition visitor, Baker succeeds in her enterprise to a remarkable extent. She actually derives relatively little help from ‘official’ museum sources—a useful reminder, perhaps, to today’s museums of the importance of archiving information about their displays, both temporary and permanent. Happily, though, a plan showing the layout of the gallery survived amongst Schliemann’s papers, and this gave the showcase numbers. Because of the perceived importance of the exhibition, and its considerable impact, it was widely covered in the UK press at both national and regional level. Baker is therefore able to comb through a large number of published accounts to reconstruct the contents of each individual case. In this way, she arrives at a remarkably detailed picture of the exhibition and of how the collection was grouped and displayed.

Schliemann’s ambitions for the exhibition were more than fulfilled in terms of the visitor numbers it attracted and the level of public interest that it generated. With the support of the staff of the South Kensington Museum, he had created an early blockbuster: a ‘must-see’ on the London scene. But as Baker’s work shows, he wanted more than that. His every effort in the exhibition’s arrangement was bent towards showing that his claims about his finds from Troy were correct. He wanted the world to believe, as he did, that he had found the Troy of the Trojan War, complete with the ‘Treasure of Priam’ and the ‘Jewels of Helen’, as well as evidence for the conflagration that caused the city’s end.

In this he was to discover, as exhibition curators always must, that audiences have minds of their own and will take their own view. As Baker remarks, this fact is welcomed in the planning of modern exhibitions, where the interaction between visitor and display (or even, by extension, between visitor and curator) is viewed as evenly weighted. Today, the agency of the viewer is intrinsic to the intention of every special exhibition. Schliemann of course lived in a more didactic time, where curators tended to address their audiences *de haut en bas*. But he was certainly unusual in that he was so intensely driven—indeed, so emotionally driven—to ‘prove’ his version of the truth about Troy. His audiences were interested and engaged, but they did not all fall under the spell of his vision. Baker does not allow herself to be drawn into an analysis of Schliemann’s complex and eccentric personality, which others have explored, rather she deftly acknowledges his peculiarities while taking a non-judgmental stance.

As she suggests in her subtitle, *Scepticism and Wonder*, she finds mixed responses in her analysis of reactions to the display. Amongst the sceptics, she cites the views of the artist William Simpson, who not only saw the exhibition but had actually visited Troy. He was a vocal critic of Schliemann’s interpretation of the site, memorably remarking that what he had uncovered there looked less like Priam’s palace and more like Priam’s pigsty (p. 13). Others, too, would laugh at Schliemann’s claims, which were often expressed so extravagantly that they invited mockery. Baker devotes a section of her book to humorous responses to Troy and Schliemann’s finds there (Chapter 7). The exhibition did not, as Schliemann had hoped, silence his critics or necessarily convince them.

Aesthetically, too, visitors often found the material difficult or just downright

disappointing. Baker writes interestingly about the mental gymnastics that some viewers put themselves through in order to see beauty in the Trojan material and to feel the sense of wonder that they believed should properly be accorded to the world of Homer’s heroes.

In truth, Schliemann himself had gone through mental gymnastics to overcome his own initial disappointment at the relatively unimpressive remains in his ‘Priam’s Troy’ (Deuel, 1978: 209–10). He felt, though, that all had been put right by his discovery of what he called ‘Priam’s Treasure’, and, unsurprisingly, the gold from Troy formed the focal point of the London exhibition. Even with this high point, though, some visitors were underwhelmed. They perhaps felt somewhat bludgeoned by showcases filled with endless spindle-whorls. These were a particular enthusiasm of Schliemann’s, as he hoped to recognise early writing in the incised marks with which they were decorated, and he included them in large numbers. There was, too, a very considerable amount of pottery on show, and Baker points out that this can only have created an odd contrast in a gallery that was also shared with some fine Sèvres ceramics and other decorative works of much later periods. The Trojan pottery must have looked drab by comparison (Chapter 4). It goes without saying that visitors would have had in their minds the visions conjured up by Homer in his descriptions of the rich trappings and accoutrements of the heroic world, but the comparisons invited by these immediate juxtapositions, too, can scarcely have helped Schliemann’s cause.

Similarly unhelpful comparisons may have played a part when it came to the reception of the Trojan jewellery itself. When Schliemann offered to sell his collection to the British Museum in 1873, he was reminded by Charles Newton, Keeper

of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, that the British Government had recently given £27,000 for the purchase of the Castellani Collection (Fitton, 1991: 13). He quotes this figure to show that Schliemann's price of £50,000 for his own collection was unrealistically high. Valuations apart, though, it may well be that recent public awareness of the very rich Castellani collection, with more than 2000 pieces of ancient (and pastiche) jewellery, might have affected responses to the jewellery from Troy. Whether or not visitors consciously made the comparison, it was certainly the case, as Baker mentions, that producers of the 'archaeological' jewellery in vogue in the latter part of the nineteenth century, including the Castellani company, turned far more to Classical and Etruscan sources of inspiration than they did to the treasure from Troy. Schliemann must have been particularly disappointed by the London goldsmith Carlo Giuliano, whom he invited to inspect the 'jewels of Helen' at close quarters, but who then produced a 'Helen of Troy' necklace that was based on a completely different source (Munn, 1984: 142–43; Villing et al., 2019: 271). In fact, the influence of the Trojan material on artists and craftsmen in all media was surprisingly slight.

There is much to interest archaeologists, museologists, and historians in this excellent book, and it is written in a flowing and engaging style that also invites a non-specialist readership. Both museum practitioners and museum visitors will undoubtedly recognise that, although so much has changed since 1877, some of the decisions Schliemann had to make when planning his exhibition remain relevant today.

One such is the decision on whether to adopt a chronological approach to the display of archaeological material. Schliemann decided not to do this, but rather to group similar types of material together.

He was not unique in this approach, as Baker explains, but he was criticized for it, on the reasonable grounds that the exhibition was confusing. Indeed, Baker quotes an article in the highly respected London *Times* newspaper from 1878, calling on him to re-arrange the display on chronological lines (p. 156). The truth was, though, that Schliemann himself had only an imperfect understanding of the site and its complexities. He tried to obscure this by punctiliously adding to each label the depth at which every object was found, but this made little sense without an accompanying demonstration of the site's stratigraphy. This was quite beyond Schliemann, and indeed would only be achieved some years after his death. At the time of his exhibition, as Baker demonstrates in her chapter 'How Old Was Troy?' (Chapter 10), it was not only this detailed picture that was lacking: a general chronological framework for the Aegean Bronze Age was only just beginning to come into focus during his lifetime.

In the British Museum exhibition *Troy: Myth and Reality* in 2019–20 (Villing et al., 2019), modern display techniques were used to place objects from Schliemann's collection into the stratigraphy of Troy as it is now understood. This was the first large-scale London exhibition devoted to Troy since that arranged by Schliemann. In a changed world, it was different in so many ways—yet as one of the curators, I can say we certainly felt some sympathy with Schliemann while working through the difficulties of creating a clear and cogent display of the material from this fiendishly complicated site.

The final chapter in Baker's book is entitled 'Dream and Reality', and she begins it by discussing the large-scale and influential German exhibition *Troia: Traum und Wirklichkeit* that opened in Stuttgart in 2001 (Latacz, 2001). She explores the opposition between myth and

reality proposed in this and other exhibitions, and the ways in which the two in fact overlap. The British Museum exhibition followed the pattern, not least because, although we curators were looking for something new, a public focus-group was invited to consider a range of proposed titles and came down strongly in favour of including ‘myth and reality’ in the exhibition’s name. It seems these concepts are so innately enmeshed within reception of both the story and the archaeology of Troy that no other outcome was possible. Baker’s excellent book demonstrates why this is still the case, as it has been since Schliemann’s exhibition in 1877. Visitors search for the historicity of the Trojan War in the archaeological remains, but at the same time have a continuing fascination with the myths of Troy, and the human truths that they reveal.

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Stephanie Moser. *Painting Antiquity: Ancient Egypt in the Art of Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Edward Poynter, and Edwin Long* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, xxv and 596 pp., numerous illustrations in b/w and colour, ISBN 9780190697020)

Painting Antiquity concludes an important phase in Stephanie Moser’s long-term work on the reception of the history of antiquity, specifically material and visual culture, in the modern era (Moser, 2006; 2012; 2015). Moser’s approach is characterised by its complexity, nuance, and consistent contextualization. The complexity draws on social and cultural history next to art history, the nuance adds personal perspectives of the artists and their audience, and the contextualization includes the political background as well as the aesthetic fascination of encountering the ancient world—the ‘exotic’ other, a treasured ancestor, and the object of admiring and discerning gazes. The Victorian

period saw historicist painting meeting Orientalism. Paintings of this era inspired by ancient artefacts demonstrate a fascination with past artisanship alongside creative reinterpretations of ancient arts and crafts. This is no coincidence: the appeal of ‘ancient objects manufactured by hand and decorated with great skill’ (p. 309) is typical of the industrial era, with its conventional art and mechanised production, that had inspired its opponents, the pre-Raphaelites or the Arts and Crafts movements. Indeed, the former also directly engaged with ancient Egyptian artefacts.

This book offers a cultural biography of paintings by Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912), Edwin Long (1829–1891),