Antiquity in plaster: production, reception and destruction of plaster copies from the Athenian Agora to Felix Meritis in Amsterdam

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4. **RENAISSANCE COLLECTIONS**

A shift in attitude towards the physical remains of antiquity

[... ] Many people would willingly have given many living and faultless horses to have one stone horse by Pheidias or Praxiteles, even if this happened to be broken or mutilated. And the beauties of statues and paintings are not an unworthy thing to behold; rather do they indicate a certain nobility in the intellect that admires them.

*Emmanuel Chrysoloras*  
(During his stay in Rome in 1411)*

**Introduction**

In many ways the Renaissance ushered in a period of change. Most striking for the historian is the evolution of historical awareness. According to Eduard Fueter (1936), who is referred to as the founder of modern historiography, the Italian humanists of the 14th- and 15th-centuries were the true founders of Western historical writing. It marked a development from narrative history that prevailed during the medieval period, to analytic history that was introduced in Europe in the 16th-century. Inevitably this resulted in the secularisation of history, it also changed magical-religious speculation into the excitement of learning and exploration. These changes had a profound effect on art traditions and, which is the focal point of my research here, (art) collectors and the history of collecting.

What increased the knowledge of Classical antiquity, during the first half of the 15th-century, was the establishment of a new ‘archaeology’ with a new methodology. In this process the city of Rome as *urbs aeterna* played a vital role. Much of what was still left of the ancient city was then rescued and recorded, right in time before the great building activities of Renaissance were to take place. Excavations, although in most cases no more than treasure hunts, brought loads of Classical works of art to light which ended up in collections of popes and prelates as well in those of private collectors. This in turn stimulated an art market for antiquities where dealers sold original antiquities, or when they were not available copies in various materials. Northern Italian collectors of antique works of art were even more dependent

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418. This is quoted from a letter by a Greek from Constantinople to his brother during his stay in Rome in 1411. Emmanuel Chrysoloras (1350-1415) was a renowned Byzantine humanist who worked as a diplomat and tutor of the Greek language. The letter testifies to the shift in attitude towards Classical sculptures that were no longer regarded as idols, but as great works of art with their own aesthetic value.

419. Fueter 1936, 9ff. Great humanistic historical writers: first and foremost Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444) and Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459).

420. Humanistic historiography was a layman movement, although Fueter (1925, 12) points out that it is not easy to say if the humanists were fully aware of their contradistinction to the Church. Yet their historical writings eliminated miracles or a divine providence.

421. As Alsop (1982, 297) quite rightly remarked: ' Cultures possessing a developed historical sense have also exhibited the historical response to art’. It is his premise that they never exist separately.

422. Although it was far from what we understand archaeology to be, yet it marked a different attitude towards the physical remains of antiquity.
than those in central Italy on small scale replicas in bronze (ill.1), terracotta, led and plaster. Cheaper alternatives, often for educational purposes, were full scale copies made in cast plaster.423 (ill.2+3)

1. Collections and prototypes of Renaissance art

A major change in taste occurred during the course of the 15th-century, which had a profound effect on European art and society. It was prepared by the pioneering intellectual activities of the late 14th-century humanists. It was they who woke the renewed interest of collectors for the material remnants of the ancient Classical culture. One of the earliest sources, which reveal an admiration from sculptors for ancient works of art is a letter by Giovanni de Dondi, dated 1375:

‘If these [antique] works were not without animation, they would excel life; the genius of great artists did not just imitate nature but indeed surpassed it’.424

The 14th-century collections, which contained Classical artworks, on the other hand played an important role in the origins of Italian Renaissance art. Because it was here that artists were able to find the prototypes for their work in the prevailing fashion of the antique.

Classical antique examples that artists could work from were not easily found. There were only a few pieces of classical sculpture that survived time unscathed and many still had to be excavated. Some could be found in Rome, e.g. the *Spinario*, the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, the Horse Tamers, plus a few broken fragments (ill.4, 5+6), and some others in different Italian cities. A ready source was the ancient gemstones that often were employed to enrich objects in medieval ecclesiastical treasuries. But it is questionable whether artists had easy access to them. Another source was antique coins, but these were also not widely available. One could not turn to art dealers because there simply were none. The discovery of an original piece of classical sculpture in a city like Florence or Siena was regarded as a considerable event in those days.425

The only ready sources that were widely available at the time were the ancient sarcophagi, they could be found in almost every Italian city. It is therefore no surprise that they were regularly used as prototypes for contemporary art. Evidence of this is provided by the Krautheimers in their study (1956) of the Gates of Paradise for the baptistery in Florence (1402-1435). They were made by Lorenzo Ghiberti, it was also this artist who was referred to by Vasari as the first to have imitated the works of the ancient Romans:

‘which he studied very carefully, as must everyone who wants to do good work’.426

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424 The fragment is from a letter sent from Rome to Fra Guglielmo da Cremona in 1375. In this passage he states that he quotes a famous sculptor which, unfortunately, is not mentioned by name. The original in Latin reads: (..) nisi illis y maginibus spiritus deesset, meliores illas esse quam vivas ac si diceret a tantorum artificum ingeniis non mode imitatam fuisse naturam verum etiam superatam, (Venice Bibl. Marciana, Ms. CL. XIV, 223 (=4340) fol. 58 verso). Also see: Gilbert 1977, 299ff.
425 Vasari (1977, 141) wrote about a visit in 1407 by the sculptor Donatello to a church in Cortona: (..) He went into the parish church, where he saw a very beautiful antique sarcophagus on which there was a scene carved in marble. At that time, before the wealth of antiquities that we enjoy today had been brought to light, this was a very remarkable discovery. (tr. George Bull).
426 Vasari (ed. 1977), 112.
Art historical research has shown that Ghiberti repeatedly borrowed motifs from sarcophagi that he knew and recombined these borrowings with great skill. However, not all the prototypes were ascertained. But it is clear that the youthful Isaac in the first pair of doors of the baptistery was modelled directly from a Lysippian or Scopasian torso.\textsuperscript{427} (ill.7) Prototypes like these could only have been found in the early Italian collections with ancient Classical art. Though the evidence merely indicates that there were such art collections, so far there is no hard evidence to back this up.\textsuperscript{428} Despite this fact many examples have been traced that illustrate cases where antique sculpture was used as a model for Renaissance artists to work from.\textsuperscript{429}

\section*{2. Encyclopaedic collections}

By the beginning of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century collecting had become an integral part of European civilisation. It was considered a suitable activity to be undertaken by a ruler, nobleman, scientist or cleric. At first a systematic approach was lacking, personal taste and interest plus the financial status of the collector determined what a collection looked like.

There was some scarce but contemporary literature on the subject that the more scholarly collector could use as a guidepost. The \textit{Inscriptiones} by Samuel Quiccheberg (1565), provided directions of how to set up an encyclopaedic collection.\textsuperscript{430} Or Gabriel Kaltemarckt who wrote a tract as a recommendation to Christian I of Saxony, \textit{Bedencken wie ein Kunst-Cammer aufzurichten seyn möchte} (1587). In their treatises both Quiccheberg and Kaltemarckt recommend plaster casts as part of a collection. These could be taken from statues, portrait medals, or from other small portraits of \textit{hominis illustres}, or even from animals.\textsuperscript{431}

Classification principles by which a collection should be arranged were defined by the humanistic rhetoric (via Cicero and Quintillian back to Aristotle). A direct source of ancient literature was the \textit{Natural History} by Pliny the Elder. It constituted a catalogue of encyclopaedic totality: thirty-seven books filled with a peculiar assortment of subjects: animals, minerals, wonders, plants etc. Pliny’s arrangement of subject matter provided the 16\textsuperscript{th}-century collector with a model of how to organise his own three dimensional collection.\textsuperscript{432}

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\textsuperscript{427} Krautheimer & Krautheimer-Hess 1956, 282.
\textsuperscript{428} Alsop 1982, 318.
\textsuperscript{429} Examples are provided by Bober and Rubinstein (1986); also see: Brendel (1955) who studied the influence of ancient art on Titian, with illustrations. For an extensive study on model-books of Roman antiquities in the Renaissance period, see: Schmitt 1970.
\textsuperscript{430} The full title of Quiccheberg’s treatise is: \textit{Inscriptiones vei tituli theatri amplissimi, complectentis rerum universitatis singulas materias et imagines eximias, ut idem recte quoque dici possit: protuarium artificiosarum miraculosarum; rerum acomnis rari thesauriet pretiosae supellectilis,structurae aerg; picturae quae hic simul in theatro conquiri consuluntur, ut eorum frequenti inspectione tractationeq, singularis aliquia rerum cognitio et prudentia admiranda, cito, facile ac tuto comparari posit.} The name \textit{Theatro} was a common concept developed in by the Italian scholar Giulio Camillo Delminio. Central premise in his \textit{L'idea del Theatro} (1550), was the art of remembrance or memo technique based on traditional humanistic philosophical principles. Jansen (1993) pointed out that Quiccheberg deviated from this humanistic classification system. His theatre or museum has a more or less scientific, technical or practical function (Jansen, D.J. in Bergvelt 1993, 57ff.). On the Renaissance genealogy of the word museum, see: Findlen, P (1989).
\textsuperscript{431} Jansen, D.J. in Bergvelt 1993, 57ff.
\textsuperscript{432} Carey 2000, 1. For different examples of Pliny’s influence on collectors see: Carey 2000, especially note 1, p.11.
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Art and curiosity cabinets were called Kunst- und Wunderkammer. The word cabinet could refer to a room or a piece of furniture. The earliest curiosity cabinet dates from 1550 and was owned by Ferdinand I of Austria, it was located in Vienna. The collection consisted of paintings, different valubles, vessels, games and natural curiosities.

As of old the possession of antique objects was a sign of wealth, moreover it gave the owner a particular status and prestige. Yet it was only until the 15th-century that the collecting of Classical antiques really commenced on a large scale. This was to be of great influence on European art concepts. It is possible to determine two main groups of collectors: artists and humanists.

Artists had their own reasons for collecting antiquities, they had a practical purpose to be used as prototypes alongside with design books. Antiquities served as a selection of models to work from: to be copied, adapted or paraphrased. For this reason it is unlikely that artists had the intention to turn their workshop into a museum, neither to impress patrons, friends and acquaintances with their collections. Research has proved that several artists actually set up a collection of antiquities of their own. Nevertheless the influence of ancient art on so many Renaissance artists is so widely spread that one has to assume that antique works of art must have been in their direct surroundings.

In the line of tradition that started in France among kings and nobles there was a development in Italy with a humanist background. The city of Florence played a significant role in this process, since it was a centre of Renaissance culture, of the studia humanitatis i.e. the intellectual endeavour on the part of scholars to unlock for the educated all the areas of ancient erudition. In addition to this the city was a major economic centre of cloth manufacture. It was also in this city that important collections of both ancient and contemporary art objects were assembled in the palaces of the great bourgeois families, such as the Strozzi, the Ruccellai, the Pazzi, the Tornabuoni, the Martelli and the Capponi. But most prominent were the Medici’s, whose banking capital made them the most powerful of all. In the 15th century the Medici appeared as collectors of antiquities second after the sculptors and humanists. They gathered around them a select circle of humanists, artists and aristocrats. A key figure was Niccolò Niccoli (1369-1437) a humanist and a most ardent collector. Beside an impressive library he owned a collection which was made up of bronzes, cups, coins, cameos, engraved gems and statues. For the necessary financial means he found a maecenas in Cosimo de’Medici, but also fellow collectors and friends presented him with antiquities. His passion for antique objects was so great that even the vessels and cups that he used at his dining table were genuine relics of the Classical world.

Piero de’Medici (1416-1469), extended the collection of his father Cosimo. Pieros attitude as a collector has a lot of references to the traditional royal French collections. For the French kings the diversity of the collection had to reflect heaven and earth. It was the expression of a universal approach to power, a visualised cosmology as it were of which the ruler saw himself as the centre. Therefore his collection has to be regarded as more than

433 A good example is the Pommersche Kunstschrances, made in 1610-15 for Philip I of Pommern, made by Ulrich Baumgartner and Matthias Walbaum. See illustration 26 in Bergvelt 1993.
435 The painter Pisanello assembled such a book. What is left of it can be found at Milan in the Ambrosiana. It includes several drawings from the antique; see: Schmitt 1966 and Fossi Todorow 1966.
438 Weiss 1988, 183.
440 Scheicher 1993, 18.
just an investment of capital. It was the first of its kind in Italy and most of it was kept in a special room called scrittorio or studiolo in the Palazzo Medici in Florence. Among the many objects in the collection were the horn of a unicorn (actually a narwhal tusk), books (including works of classical writers), maps, mirrors, clocks, jewellery, coins and gems. In the pleasures of the studiolo we see all great themes of the Renaissance united. Here one could reminisce the greatness of Classical culture, in addition it stimulated individualism for here Renaissance man could find seclusion with the greatest distance to public life and exercise his mind in independence; two great humanist ideals.

Large classical sculpture formed part of the collection and was displayed in the garden of the Palazzo Medici. At the time sculpture was not as highly regarded as ancient gems, medals and coins in silver and gold, or antique or pseudo-antique vessels. It was not until later that antique sculptures as the Apollo of Belvedere, the Laocoön and the Medici Venus became famous and generally admired. It was by then that large antique sculptures were acquiredd a higher place in the collectors’ hierarchy.

During the course of the 16th century, the concept of an encyclopaedic collection of which elements were already present in the de'Medici collection was more systematically developed in the scrittorio of François I and in the Uffici in Florence. Here both poles of ars and natura were represented by the objects of the collection.

An important collector was Cassiano dal Pozzo. In 1615 he commenced a collection which he called his Museo Cartaceo (Paper Museum). Aside from drawings of artists of the Quattrocento and the High Renaissance, he commissioned hundreds of drawings after the Antique and examples of curiosities of every kind. Cassiano also had plastercasts made of works of sculpture, such as the reliefs of Trajan's Column. In addition, he collected a whole range of natural history, therefore his collection is called a Wunderkammer of objects.

The secular approach to learning and factual knowledge was stimulated in several ways. Of great influence was the astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus who published his De Revolutionibus orbium coelestium Libri VI in 1543. The Copernican heliocentric view of the universe had great consequences for how man perceived his position in the world; it resulted in a de-anthropocentric philosophy with a secular view of the world. It was in fact a rebellion

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441 Filarete described the role the collection played in Pieros life in the twenty-fifth book of his treatise on architecture. Also see: Liebenwein 1977, 80.
442 For the philosophical concepts related to the studiolo see: Schaefer 1976, 202ff, with an extensive bibliography in chapt. 4, n.1; Thornton 1999.
443 Machiavelli called his studiolo a courtyard of antiquity. Wolfgang Liebenwein (1977, 90) very perceptively pointed out that: 'In the artificial environment of the studiolo objects lost their own meaning and became a symbol, where, so it was thought, the mind could better concentrate'
444 Vasari provides us with evidence that Classical sculptures were on display in the garden of the palazzo Medici in Florence. He reports that the sculptor Donatello restored an ancient statue of Marsyas for Cosimo de Medici that was placed at the entrance of palazzo's garden (Vasari, Lives (ed.) 1977, 375).
446 Cassiano dal Pozzo (1588-1657), was an Italian scholar, collector and the secretary of Cardinal Francesco Barberini.
447 Heller 1981, 376. For a detailed study on the relationship between world-view, philosophy, and science in the Renaissance period see: Heller 1981, Part 3 chapt.7, Part 4 and chapt.12. Heller emphasized that: ‘one of the greatest achievements of the scientific spirit of the Renaissance was precisely the drawing of a sharp distinction between subject and object. Immediate experience was increasingly evoked by the beauty and harmony of nature interpreted as an object in itself. Humanity discovered the magnificence, the "wonders" of its own world. The parallels between the wonders of human nature and those of the nature surrounding man did not indicate that men had subjectivized the worlds, but rather that man and humanity also had come to be regarded objectively; here, too, philosophical anthropology is inseparable from the universal exaltation of nature’.
against several ecclesiastical dogmas. Beside the question of whether the earth was the centre of the universe it was also an effrontery to the Christian view that regarded man as the crown of creation.\textsuperscript{448} Subsequently man lost this privileged position and could regain his sovereignty only by attempting to embrace the infinite in thought.\textsuperscript{449} It is for this reason that Humanists had a universal attitude, a desire to possess the world through the intellect. This incited not only an omnivorous appetite for knowledge but also a new curiosity for the past, as is often the case in times of change and unrest. It is against this background that antique sculpture was attributed a higher status in the hierarchy of art. It also prepared the way for a shift in taste among art-collectors and incited inspiration among artists for the antique.

3. A revived interest: a new kind of archaeology

As we have seen in the previous chapter some antiquities were recognized and treasured during the medieval period. What made them collectable was their appeal to the eye or because they were made of rare or luxurious materials. They also served as an object for investment of capital. Or even, in the case of gems or cameos, because magical powers were ascribed to them. But antique objects were certainly not regarded as the expression of a great culture.\textsuperscript{450}

During the High Renaissance a new attitude was established; now antiquities were collected not just for of romantic or aesthetic reasons but because they contained important information of a great, but lost culture. The first impulse came from early humanists like Dante (1265-1321) and Petrarch (1304-1374), but despite their deep devotion to great Roman writers, they were not acquainted with the material remains of antiquity.\textsuperscript{451}

The earlier Italian writers (first half 15\textsuperscript{th}-century) on the history of art, such as Lorenzo Ghiberti, Leone Battista Alberti and especially Giorgio Vasari considered Classical art to be the basis for the Renaissance style. They also thought that Classical art ceased to exist with the beginning of the Christian era. The reason for this decline, so they believed, was the invasions of barbarous tribes and the hostility of early Christian priests and scholars. What is new in this attitude is the awareness that one lived in a new era separated from antiquity.

As been said before, during the first half of the 15\textsuperscript{th}-century the general knowledge of antiquity was much enlarged by the results of a new kind of archaeology. The focus was mainly on Roman archaeology, for several reasons the archaeology of Etruria or Greece was not seriously practised.

The study of the Etruscan culture was limited to some incidental ‘archaeological’ research, for example by Leon Battista Alberti, who was not only an artist but also had an extensive knowledge of Classical culture. In 1466 aan Etruscan tomb was opened at Volterra, where many ceramic objects and cinerary urnes were brought to light. However excavations in this period were often more treasure hunts than serious archaeological research, this is also what happened in the ancient Etruscan city Tarquinia. Moreover the Etruscan language had not yet been deciphered, despite nonsensical attempts by someone like Annio da Viterbo.\textsuperscript{452}

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\textsuperscript{448} In the Christian notion man is the crown of creation, in *Psalm* eight verse six it reads: 'For thou [God] hast made him [man] a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour'.

\textsuperscript{449} Bazin 1967, 55.

\textsuperscript{450} Weiss, 1988, 2. Although Ross (1934, 6) pointed out that some early Christian emperors did take steps to preserve public monuments that they considered worthy of care and respect.

\textsuperscript{451} As Roberto Weiss (1969) very appropriately pointed out; they were first and foremost bibliophiles not archaeologists. Although Petrarch had an antiquarian interest in Roman coins of which he assembled a small collection.

Before Greece was conquered by the Turks in 1453, the mainland was divided up into several Franconian states while the islands of Asia Minor were ruled by the Venetians. It was also disregarded by the important trade- and pilgrim routes. With regard to Greek archaeology it was Ciriaco d'Ancona (1391-ca.1452) who travelled his whole life through Italy, Greece and the Levantine Isles in search for the physical remains of antiquity. In 1443, he visited the Morea in Greece, where he copied inscriptions mentioned in the correspondence of Filelfo, Traversari, Leonardo, Aretino, and others. He is accounted the best equipped, most learned, and accurate worker in the realm of epigraphy during the period of the Renaissance. Most of his manuscripts have been lost; what we know of them is through those published by other writers. By the 1470s all archaeological research (if it may be named as such) had stopped, this was mainly due to obstructions caused by the Turkish domination over the Greek world.

Since no systematic excavations had been carried out in Greece, one was dependable on ancient Classical writers for information. This was very much the case with ancient sculpture. Even when Giorgio Vasari published his famous Lives in 1550 his chronology of Greek sculpture, however correct, was based on written sources, mostly Pliny. Vasari had no real notion of the sculptures themselves, because they had not yet been excavated. Another reason for the rather limited scope of archaeology in those days is that the humanism of the Renaissance was primarily Latin and not Greek orientated.

A change was brought about by humanistic scholars and artists like Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72), Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), Lorenzo Valla (1405/07-c.1457) and Flavio Biondo (1392-1463). They contributed greatly to a more secular and empirical approach towards the past. New methods were established for the research of archaeological remains and one of the greatest achievements was the understanding of the ancient building techniques. It also resulted in an attempt to rescue and record as much as possible of what was still left of the ancient city of Rome. Although before 1500 Rome was a decayed town of moderate size, she had never lost her charisma. From antiquity onward she remained to have the reputation of caput mundi in the West. In addition to this the humanist spirit brought about an almost religious devotion to ancient Rome and its remains. An important development was a new scientific archaeological topography of the city; the Roma instaurata, which was written by Biondo in 1447. This was an urgent matter because many of the ancient ruins were being demolished to make way for the new Renaissance Rome. Much destruction took place during the reign of Pope Eugenius IV (1431-1447) and his successor Nicholas V. It is curious that their enthusiasm for Greek and Roman classics did not extend to the archaeological remains. Perhaps this attitude was influenced by the medieval concept of beauty. A serious attempt at archaeological preservation was the bull of Pope Pius II in 1462 to protect the ruins of Rome. Although it did not prevent that the eastern colonnade of the Portico of Octavia (so called Trullo) and other monuments to be used as a quarry to obtain building materials for the construction of the Vatican Palace.

When Raphael was put in charge of the building activities of the new St. Peters, he was also empowered to collect building stones in and around Rome. Most of the stones came from ancient buildings that were used as stone quarries for cheap building material. The letter from Pope Leo X testifies of this:

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453 What is known of his writings was published posthumously in the Itinerarium (Florence, 1742).
454 See: Vasari Lives, preface part II, (ed. 1977, 85) Here he divides Greek sculpture in three periods: first primitive, then the period of Canachus followed by that of Myron and Polykleitos.
455 It is peculiar that this was not extended to the universities, in Italy as well as elsewhere in Europe, conservative forces had the upper hand, for the structure of education remained quite medieval (that is Aristotelian).
Since it is greatly in the interest of the construction of the Roman temple of the Prince of the Apostles that the supply of stones and marble, of which we need an abundance, should be had at home rather than brought from afar; and [since] I have determined that the City’s ruins suffice as an ample source for this material, and that stones of every kind are dug up here and there by practically everyone who in Rome, or near Rome, undertakes to build, or simply to turn the earth. You, whom I employ as master of this building project, and whose skill in your craft and trustworthyness I have inspected and tested in many affairs. I appoint as overseer of all marbles and stone which henceforth shall be dug up in Rome, or within ten miles of Rome.

It was stipulated that stones with inscriptions on them were not to be cut before Raphael had a look at them, because they (..) ‘would be worthwhile for the cultivation of literature and for improving the elegance of the Roman language’.

4. Originals and plaster copies

Despite the destruction of ancient monuments there was also a positive side. The intense building activities in Rome after 1500 brought numerous new antique marble sculptures to light. This by itself contributed to the greatness of the Urbs Aeterna.

In 1471 a significant event that marks a change in attitude towards ancient Classical sculpture took place. According to an inscription, in this year Pope Sixtus IV donated 'to the Roman people' the ancient bronze statues, which throughout the medieval period had stood in the open air on high columns near the Lateran Palace, and removed them to the Capitoline Hill. Among these were the Wolf, the Camillus and the Spinario. The statues were also placed on the ground so that they were clearly visible for the onlookers. It is obvious that they were no longer used for church propaganda, but admired for their intrinsic beauty. The humanist admiration for Classical art as formulated by Emmanuel Chrysoloras at the beginning of the 15th-century had now reached the highest church authority. Of significance is also the fact that shortly after 1498 the equestrian statue that was formerly attributed as being emperor Constantine, was now recognised as that of Marcus Aurelius, scrupulously restored and also placed on the Capitoline Hill.

The revived interest in Classical culture was also an incentive to collect Classical sculptures. When originals could not be obtained collectors resorted to copies. This spurred on the reintroduction in Italy by the early 15th-century of the plaster casting technique, that was already applied in bronze casting. The technique of bronze casting had never completely been lost, on could think of church-bell casting which had old roots. In Padua the painter Francesco Squarcione (1397-1468), who was the teacher of Andrea Mantegna, owned a collection of fragments of ancient statues and carvings. Among these were also plaster casts, either made by him or his pupils. Doubts about the correctness of Vasari’s statement in regard to Squarcione’s practise

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459. Hommes 1999. During the Middle Ages it was generally believed to represent Constantine (according to the Mirabilia). Constantine was the first Christian emperor; this is the reason why the statue survived the Middle Ages unscathed. Had it been known that it represented Marcus Aurelius it would probably have found its way to the forge, as was the fate of so many antique bronze statues.
460. Vasari III, Life of Andrea Mantegna (tr. George Bull, p.241). Here we find a passage that refers to the teacher of Mantegna, Francesco Squarcione who was an indifferent painter. (..) ‘Squarcione knew
of taking plaster casts were refuted by documents dating from 1455 concerning the apprenticeship of Marco Zoppo. In these documents there is a statement that Zoppo brought from Bologna and handed over to Squarcione, as part of the price of tuition in the art of painting, a quantity of plaster ‘for shaping to figures and images’. Which particular antique sculptures or casts served as examples for his students cannot be ascertained. Only one from Squarcione’s pupil Mantegna was identified: the Faustina, which Isabella d’Este obtained from Mantegna and is now in the collection of the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua.

Apart from functioning in a didactic context as part of the education of artists, plaster casts were collected as independent art objects in private humanists’ collections. One of the most interesting ones, that for the most part fortunately survived time, is the one of the lawyer Marco Benavides (1489-1582) in Padua. As a predecessor of later scholarly collections his collection was solely made up of casts of portraits of famous men from antiquity. These plaster casts have to be regarded not merely as reproductions but as formal artworks.

In De sculptura the humanist and artist Pomponius Gauricus (c.1482-c.1530) testifies to how wide spread the knowledge of the technique of plaster casting was by the end of the 15th century. This treatise, first published in 1504 in Florence, contains in addition to a theory of proportions a manual on art techniques which provides detailed information on the technique of plaster casting. The latter was unusual, for in this period we do not find any similar treatises which include instructions with technical procedures for artists. Gauricus had close contacts with well-known artists in Venice and Padua, like Tullio Lombardo, Andrea Riccio and Severo da Ravenna. But the treatise more influenced artists north of the Alps than in Italy, Albrecht Dürer is known to have made use of it. It seems that later writers on art were not familiar with Gauricus treatise. It is thought that he was more popular among encyclopaedists and antiquarians for whom numerous editions of De sculptura were published in northern Europe from the 16th to the 18th-century onward.

Another related phenomenon of the manufacture of casted copies we find with the German humanist Ulrich Gossenbrot. In 1460 he made lead castings in Padua of medallions that were intended for collectors who were more interested in their artistic than their financial value.

Copies of antique sculpture were widely used for interior decoration. By the end of the 15th-century it was not uncommon to find small antique statues or statues in the antique style in Renaissance interiors. As we have already said it is known that, by the beginning of the 15th-century, collectors kept small sculptures of bronze or terracotta in their studii. But they also found their way into other rooms of a less private character. Italian Renaissance inventories that he himself was not the world’s greatest painter, and so in order to help Andrea learn more than he could teach he made him study from casts taken from antique statues (…) which he sent for from various places, but especially Tuscany and Rome. Also see: Fiocco 1958/59, 59-61. Published by Lazzarini & Moschetti, 1908 pp.52, 149 doc. XXXVIII.

Also quoted in Lightbown 1986, 18.


Himmelmann 1989, 190.


Peter Thornton (1991) pointed out that: ‘by the middle of the century most educated people were regarding Classical art as very much part of their own heritage, and a class of object entirely suitable for the adornment of their own houses’.
show that antique statues were usually referred to as idol statues, thus something that was clearly regarded as pagan. This attitude did not prevent that by the middle of the 16th-century antique statues became a common feature as an object of interior decoration in Italian houses.\textsuperscript{469} Sculpted busts and small (antique) statues were placed in eye catching positions, above doorways but also sometimes as chimneypieces, or on a mantle-shelf or a bracket.\textsuperscript{470} All this is evident from inventories but can also be seen on several contemporary paintings of Renaissance interiors, for example by Vittore Carpaccio from Venice, or an anonymous mural from Padua (ill.8+9). Such statues were rarely originals, they were small copies made out of different materials, if one could afford it they were made of bronze, but usually cheaper versions of gilded, patinated or painted plaster, terracotta or even \textit{papier mâché} were used for this purpose. An example of plaster statuettes that was to resemble bronze is found in connection with the Venetian jeweller Antonio Fontana who owned twelve small busts of the Twelve Caesars which were of \textit{stucco finse de bronzo}.\textsuperscript{471}

Small statuettes of plaster were common in the collections of discriminating connoisseurs (ill.2+3). Like Alvise Odoni, who owned \textit{Un san Hieronimo di stucco}. This plaster statue -in this context stucco could also mean plaster- stood on the cornice in his fine house in Venice in 1555.\textsuperscript{472} Inventory lists of the Medici family indicate that, at least since 1492, several plaster statuettes and reliefs were part of the collection. It is possible that they were plaster models that sculptors used as preliminary studies to work from.\textsuperscript{473} Although it has been argued that they were not to made of plaster at all, but merely relief carvings coated with plaster.\textsuperscript{474} This was the case with one Madonna statue of which the inventory explicitly stipulates that it was a relief (\textit{Una Nostra Donna di gesso di relievo}).\textsuperscript{475} But the inventory mentions other Madonna statues made of plaster, which were not listed as reliefs and should therefore not be regarded as such.\textsuperscript{476} All this clearly confirms that plaster statues were valued as decorative and/or collector’s items.

5. Plaster statues: \textit{Kunstkammer} and royal collections

Evidence on the practise of making plaster casts of art objects especially for collectors who travelled in Italy comes from the draughtsman and learned traveller Gabriel Kaltemarckt. In 1587 he wrote some guidelines on how a Cabinet or \textit{Kunstkammer} should be formed:

\begin{quote}
(\ldots)’When you get something good, you only get little bit, barely one or two pieces, so that it is difficult to acquire a significant number. Therefore, the artists have developed a very convenient means, so that statues be they of stone, metal, wood or any other material, be they big as they please, can be made into fragments of plaster, cast in any kind of material, and prepared in such a way that there is no traceable difference between the originals and the cast copies. In this way, all distinguished artful statues, both ancient
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{469} For elaboration see: Thornton 1991, 269.
\item \textsuperscript{470} Ibidem.
\item \textsuperscript{471} Thornton 1991, 268.
\item \textsuperscript{472} According to the Odoni Inventory.
\item \textsuperscript{473} Holst 1967, 61.
\item \textsuperscript{474} Peter Thornton (1991, 268) believed this was the case with the \textit{Nostra Donna di gesso} mentioned in the Medici inventory.
\item \textsuperscript{475} Medici inventory, Florence 1456  Eugène Müntz (ed.), p.93: \textit{Una Nostra Donna di gesso di relievo}, fol.10.
\item \textsuperscript{476} Ibidem: Una Nostra Donna di gesso, fol.5; Tre Nostre Donne di gesso, fol.10.
\end{itemize}
and modern, in Florence or elsewhere in Italy, may, without great expense, be made into moulds, and the moulds may, at modest expense, be brought home to Dresden by sea.\textsuperscript{477}

The first large scale commission for exact copies of classical statuary for collection purposes came from the French King François I, around 1540. By this time the Italian sculptor Primaticcio, who worked under his patronage in France, was sent to Rome. Here he was ordered to make plaster models for bronze casting of the greatest surviving works of antiquity. It was a rather extensive enterprise for we know that they were transported by sea from Civitavecchia in fifty-eight cases, and two barrels. When they arrived some of the moulds were damaged, the repairs led to inaccuracies in stance or detail.\textsuperscript{478} In the end some 125 plaster moulds were manufactured.\textsuperscript{479} (ill.10a+b) With the assistance of the young architect Vignola bronze casts were made from the plaster moulds at a specially constructed foundry near Fontainebleau. They served as ornaments in the corridors of the king’s most prestigious castle. By the end of 1543 Primaticcio returned to Rome, a second set of moulds was made, but no bronzes were cast from these.\textsuperscript{480}

Some artists were exclusively involved in making copies and reproductions of antique works of art mainly for collectors. They also made imitations which were for all practical purposes forgeries. In Mantua worked Alari Bonacolsi (1460-1528) (who called himself ‘Antico’), in Padua Andrea Riccio (1470-1532) and in Venice Tullio Lombardo (1455-1532).\textsuperscript{481}

During this period the knowledge of the most beautiful and renowned statues of Rome was spread throughout Europe by numerous prints.\textsuperscript{482} This actually increased the importance and popularity of casts and copies for collectors.

6. Collections: Rome and other centres in Italy

From 1480 onwards a number of cardinals showed an interest in the antique statues that were being discovered in and around Rome. The most ardent collectors of antiquities were Julius II (1503-1513) and Pope Paul III (1534-1549). When he was still cardinal, Julius persuaded Alexander VI (1492-1503) to allow his exploitation of ruins near San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura, where he was building his palazzo. The site turned out to be a mine of antiquities; from the wall of one ancient fortress he recovered twenty busts of emperors. After having obtained from the pope the rights to all the statuary he could carry away in one night, he is said to have mobilised a force of seven hundred ox-drawn wagons to transport his unexpected acquisitions.\textsuperscript{483} After

\textsuperscript{477} Quoted from: Gabriel Kaltemarckt, Bedenken wie einer Kunst-Cammer aufzurichten seyn möchte (1587), [tr.] Barbara Gutleisch. The original text reads: (...) ist etwas gutes, doch gar wenig. und kaum eins / oder 2 stück geschickt, daher nicht leichtlich zu einer / mercklichen Anzal zu kommen, Dieweil / aber durch die Künstler ein ser bequemer vor- / theil erfunden, Das allerlei Status sy sein // (43r/38b) Stein, Metall, Holz oder von anderer materia / auch so groß die Imer mögen, von Gipps stück- / weise geformet, und von allerley materien ge- / gossen. und dermassen zugerichtet werden können, / das zwischen den rechten Originalien und den nach- / gegossenen kein unterschidt zu mercken, Als möchte / durch diß mittel one grosse unkosten. alle für- / neme künstliche Status, antiqui und moderni / zu Florenz und anderen orth in Italia. abgeformet, / und die Formen mit geringen kosten zu wasser / biß hiefer gegen Dresden gebracht werden, (Dresden Staatsarchiv, loc. 9835 f.43, transcription in: Gutleisch & Menzhausen 1989, 28).

\textsuperscript{478} Haskell & Penny 1982, 4.

\textsuperscript{479} According to Vasari VII, p.408.

\textsuperscript{480} Haskell & Penny 1982, 4.

\textsuperscript{481} Holst 1967, 73.

\textsuperscript{482} Haskell & Penny 1982, 17.

\textsuperscript{483} Bazin 1967, 51.
having been elected pope himself he continued his investigations, that is he stripped several more sites and monuments to extend his private collection. This was also facilitated by the fact that when diggings were carried out on land that was property of the state; some part of the finds had to be handed over to the Camera apostolica. This could vary from one-fourth to one-third.484

By the end of the 15th century it became common practice among collectors in Rome to put antique sculpture out of doors in gardens.485 Such gardens were called statuaria, a tradition that came to Rome from Florence. An early example is the ‘garden of S. Pietro in Vincoli’ that belonged to Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere (later Pope Julius II) where the young Michelangelo used to study. Another example is the Belvedere gardens which were created under Pope Innocent VIII (1484-1492) near the Vatican Palace. A significant event took place in the first decades of the 16th-century, when Pope Julius II created a special place of exhibition for the papal collection of classical sculptures in the Belvedere Court of the Vatican palace486 (ill.11).

Antique sculpture in a Christian surrounding like the pope's gardens in the Vatican and later in the Belvedere Court evoked hostile feelings. One could say that overall these antique sculptures were admired for their intrinsic beauty.487 The ambivalence in these statues was that they lost their original meaning as votive offerings in the ancient temples.488 Classical mythology was transformed into a kind of neo-platonic poetical 'theology' that suited humanist thinking. Evidence of an awareness of this ambivalence is found in a remark by Pope Adrian VI (1522-1523). He stated that the Laocoon and other antique statues were 'the idols of the ancients'.489 It was also for this reason that he had all the doors to the Belvedere locked except one, of which only he owned the key. Some regarded these statues as a tribute to paganism and believed that such statues should be removed from the Vatican all together.490 Pope Pius IV (1559-1565) ordered that most of the antique statues should be handed over to the Roman people and subsequently they were relocated at the Capitoline hill. The most valuable pieces that stood in the Cortile of the Belvedere were to share the same fate. The pope felt it was rather unbecoming that the successor of Saint Peter had pagan statues in his palace. An inventory, compiled on February 11th 1566 records that 127 pieces of sculpture were handed over to the Roman people, on February 27th a further list of twenty busts and statues was added.491 It was also under the authority of Pius IV that the niches of the Belvedere court, which contained ancient statues, were closed off by large wooden doors.492 He had them installed there as an act of defiance against pagan statues. The doors are depicted on an engraving by Marius Kartarus from 1574 (ill.12a+b). Pius V, who was elected pope in 1566, wanted to deal with 'pagan' humanism once

485. Holst (1967, 72) points out that in some Christian circles these sculpture gardens with antiquities were regarded as a kind of pagan grove, set up in honour of the goddess of love.
486. On the (christian) reinterpretation of ancient classical sculptures at the papal court in Rome during the early 16th century, see: Kempers 2007, 61-72.
487. Some, like Haskell & Penny (1981, 15), doubt this and explain the main impulse behind it as historic nostalgia.
488. Although this was already a tradition during late Antiquity.
489. Vasari Le Opere (ed. G. Milanesi) reprint Florence 1973, 9 vol., VII, 407. This reaction was to be expected from a man like Adrian VI, who was raised in the spirit of the devotio moderna, which promoted Christian inwardness and chastity.
490. See the lampoon by the Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (cousin of Giovanni): De Expellendis Venere e Cupidine, of 1513, on the expulsion of classical sculpture from the papal gardens of the Vatican. In an introductory letter to his poem Gianfrancesco characterised the Venus statue from the Vatican Belvedere as a sinister power and the darkness of false superstition that had been put to flight by true religion. For elaboration see: Brummer 1992, 67-76; Schmitt 1967, 26. For elaboration on Gianfrancesco’s religious views see: Schmitt 1970, 161-178.
492. Gamucci, 1565, 199; For elaboration on the Belvedere Court, see: Winter 1998.
and for all. To emphasise this he simply gave away a large number of antique statues, like a
donation to Emperor Maximillian II of a dozen antique emperor busts.\footnote{Sixtus V (1585-1590)
planned to remove the statues of Laocoon and Apollo from the Vatican.\footnote{Despite all this the
creation of the papal Belvedere collection proved to be a leading factor for European taste as a
whole and its art historical significance should not be underestimated.}}

In the same period two other major private collections evolve, that of Cardinal Grimani
and that of Sassi. Soon these were followed by the collections of Medici, della Valle, Cesi, Carpi
and Farnese.\footnote{Around 1500 collectors no longer displayed their collections of antique sculpture
next to each other (ill.13), but placed them in niches and incorporated them in the general archi-
tectural layout of their villas and palaces. A picture ascribed to Sebastian Vranck gives an
impression of the back of the Villa Medici in Rome with its garden looked like around 1600
(ill.14). An engraving after a drawing by Maerten Van Heemskerck shows the courtyard of the
Palazzo Valle-Capranica, where antique statues are fully incorporated in the façades of the
building (ill.15). The Villa Borghese on the Pincio hill in Rome, that was built in 1613-1616, had
ancient statues and ancient reliefs placed in niches as decoration of the façade.\footnote{Because of
the way these collections were displayed they could be called the first museums in
Rome, although it is obvious that they were meant to be seen by only a humanist elite of trained
art-lovers. It is small wonder that they had a strong influence on the work of contemporary ar-
tists, that is the generation of Raphael (1483-1520).}}

At first antique sculptures were not difficult to obtain for art lovers and enthusiasts. But
the growing demand increased the prices that resulted into centralisation. After 1585 most of the
important pieces were incorporated in major collections. By the beginning of the 17th century
the collections of Medici and Farnese, but also those of Borghese, Ludovisi and Giustiani
dominated the art market in Rome.\footnote{Besides Rome there existed other humanistic centres, such as
Florence and Padua where collections of antique sculpture could be found. In Florence, around 1440, sculptors like Ghiberti
and Donatello owned a small collections with Classical works of art. In the same city Lorenzo
de’ Medici extended the art collection of his ancestors that was kept in the family palace on the
Via Larga. Among contemporary works of art also antiquities were found. One of the most
prestigious objects in the collection was the so-called \textit{Tazza Farnese}, this sardonix cup was and
is one of the largest of all the known antique cameo’s (ill.17). It was bought by Lorenzo in Rome
in 1471; he valued it at 10.000 ducats.\footnote{In 1489 the collection grew so large that Lorenzo
created a 'Garden of Antiquities' in the vicinity of the monastery of San Marco. There exists a
letter from Lorenzo to his son Piero, instructing him to show an important visitor the
antiquities in the garden as well as the palazzo.\footnote{It was also intended as a school of art that
benefited many artists.}}

In Venice many antique works of art could be found brought from the colossal Venetian
empire in the eastern Mediterranean. The Venetian painter Gentile Bellini (c.1429-1507) is

\footnote{For a complete list of all the antique statues from the Vatican that were given away see: Adolf
1890, Anhang II, pp. 60-67.}
\footnote{Adolf 1890, 48.}
\footnote{For elaboration see: Riebesell 1989.}
\footnote{As is clear from a painting by Wilhelm Baur in 1636, see ill. 42 in Kalveram 1995.}
\footnote{Valerius 1992, 97.}
\footnote{This was a thousand times more than a panel by Botticelli, who was a celebrated contemporary
artist, would fetch. See: Holst 1967, 64.}
\footnote{See: Frey 1963, 74-75; Lorenzo and his ancestors were avid collectors of classical sculpture. It is
peculiar that this does not show up in the inventory. Alsop (1982, 398) explains this from the fact that
most of the large sculptures were exhibited in the garden and that presumably the inventory makers
never went outside to take stock.}
known to have owned a torso that he believed to be the *Aphrodite of Praxiteles*. In Ferrara the
d'Este family owned antique works of art. In Padua, traditionally a centre of humanism, a
contractor named Francesco Squarcione (1397-1468) owned a considerable collection of
fragments of Classical sculpture and architecture. How much of a painter he was we don’t know;
but we do know that he undertook designing and painting to be executed by people in his
employ. He was also a dealer in antiquities that he accumulated from his travels in Greece and
Italy. They served as models to the benefit of his students, but his shop was also frequented by
distinguished people who passed through Padua, and by the humanists teaching at the famous
university there.500

Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506), an adopted son and student of Squarcione, followed his
master's example and set up an archaeological collection in his house in Mantua. It must have
been quite significant because even Lorenzo de'Medici came to see it. Near Milan in Gavullo
Castle Bishop-elect Ludovico Gonzaga (1412-1478) kept a collection of genuine antique
sculpture augmented with numerous plaster casts. Shortly before 1440 the humanist Poggio
Bracciolini placed some antique sculptures in the garden of his country house in Terranova. The
way in which antique sculptures were exhibited earned much appreciation. Especially the grotto
that Daniele da Volterra (1509-1566) had built for the *Ariadne of Belvedere* as *figura divina*.501

All these developments contributed considerably to the eminence of the copy, cast and
print as an important cultural phenomenon. The artists themselves fulfilled an important role in
this process just as the patrons and maecenases did. The renewed interest in Classical Antiquity
stimulated archaeological interests, excavations lead to the rediscovery of the magnificence of
ancient sculpture. The great collections with antiquities that were started by the popes became an
example for collectors and rulers and turned it into a fashion.

* * *

500 On Volterra see: Berenson 1960, 179; on Mantegna see Weiss 1988, 181ff.
501 Ladendorf 1953, 53.