Antiquity in plaster: production, reception and destruction of plaster copies from the Athenian Agora to Felix Meritis in Amsterdam
Godin, F.T.J.

Citation for published version (APA):
6.
MUSEUMS AND FRENCH SPOILS OF WAR
The Atelier de Moulages and new concepts of the imitation of the antique in the 18th- and 19th-centuries

Der erste Anblick schöner Statuen ist bei dem, welcher Empfindung hat, wie die erste Aussicht auf das offene Meer, worinn sich unser Blick verliert, und starr wird\textsuperscript{587}. Das algemeine vorzügliche Kennzeichen der Griechischen Meisterstücke ist endlich eine edle Einfalt, und eine stille Grösse, so wohl in der Stellung als im Ausdruck\textsuperscript{588}.

\textit{Johann Joachim Winckelmann}

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to exhibit how plaster statues and related phenomena fitted into this period of Neo-classicism. The focus of attention will be on France, because although the Enlightenment started in England, its concepts were formulated in Paris. The more so since French philosophers of the Enlightenment were very much involved with the formulation of artistic and aesthetic ideals. Jean d’Alembert, who was one of the most important scholars of the age, wrote in 1759:

‘A very remarkable change in our ideas is taking place, a change whose rapidity seems to promise an even greater transformation to come. (..) If one considers without bias the present state of our knowledge, one cannot deny that philosophy among us has shown progress. Natural science from day to day accumulates new riches. Geometry, by extending its limits, has borne its torch into the regions of physical science which lay nearest at hand. The true system of the world has been recognised, developed, and perfected. (..) In short, from the earth to Saturn, from the history of the heavens to that of insects, natural philosophy has been revolutionised; and nearly all other fields of knowledge have resumed new forms’.\textsuperscript{589}

The 18\textsuperscript{th} century was first and foremost the age of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was also the beginning of modernity, where new and idealistic conceptions of ‘reason’ and ‘nature’, of ‘free thought’ and the importance of the individual were defined and promoted in the Salons of Paris.\textsuperscript{590}

\textsuperscript{587}. Winckelmann 1934, 273.
\textsuperscript{588}. Winckelmann 1968, 43.
\textsuperscript{589}. D’Alembert 1759, Vol IV [tr.] Ernst Cassirer 1966, 3. The original text reads: ‘On aperçoit sans peine qu’il s’est fait à plusieurs égards un changement bien remarquable dans nos idées; changement qui par sa rapidité semble nous en promettre un plus grand encore (..) Si on examine sans prévention l’état actuel de nos connaissances, on ne peut découvrir des progrès de la philosophie parmi nous. La science de la nature acquiert de jour en jour de nouvelles richesses; la géométrie en reculant ses limites, a porté son flambeau dans les parties de la physique qui se trouvoient le plus près d’elle; le vrai système du monde a été connu, développé et perfectionné (..) en un mot depuis la terre jusqu’à Saturne, depuis l’histoire des cieux jusqu’à cette des insectes, la physique a changé de face avec elle presque toutes les autres sciences ont pris une nouvelle forme’.
\textsuperscript{590}. The role of the Paris salons was of paramount importance for the revolutionary developments that took place in the 18th-century. Harold Nicolson (1960, 214ff.) pointed out that in the course of the
The new ideal of knowledge was developed by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, in particular by René Descartes (1596-1650). His conception of ‘universal wisdom’ (sapientia universalis), professed to embrace all parts of knowledge, all sides and aspects of ability. The change that d’Alembert referred to could therefore just as easily be applied to the arts. Ernst Cassirer (1966) pointed out that: ‘Not only will the sciences in the stricter sense of the word - logic, mathematics, physics, and psychology- receive a new direction and definition through this ideal, but art too is subjected to the same rigorous demand’. Poetics, rhetoric and the theory of the fine arts had to be measured and tested by the principles of reason, for only such an examination would prove whether it contained something genuine that would last and have substance.

As a consequence of this attitude the previous ornate and aristocratic Rococo style was rejected with a call for a return to reason, nature and morality in art. It marks a shift that took place throughout Europe and that had become customary by the 1770s among artists, architects and theorists in France, Italy, Germany and England. New principles in art were defined of what was then called the ‘true style’, which later became known as Neo-classicism. The style that had to replace Baroque and Rococo was a sober classicism that was based on Classical antiquity. 17th-Century Classicism was much admired and functioned as a source of inspiration. Two great scholars, Winckelmann and Gibbon, the one an antiquarian, the other an historian, spurred on this interest in Classical antiquity.

Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) was an archaeologist and historian of ancient art. It was his axiom that the only way to greatness was to follow the supreme example that was set in Classical antiquity. In 1764 his opus magnum entitled: Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums, was published. It proved to be a milestone for a deeper insight into the art and history of Classical antiquity. His attitude was entirely determined by the cultural-historic notions of the Enlightenment. This implied order, a critical research of different domains and a rigid historiographical method. Winckelmann applied these premises to the ancient Greek world. It has to be noted here that the artworks he knew were thought to be Greek originals but in fact were almost all Roman copies. What was new was the fact that his book combined insights and knowledge that previously had been disseminate among antiquarians, philologists, philosophers and dilettantes. Moreover it blended these insights stylistically with artworks located in Roman villas, palaces and other collections. His chronology of ancient sculpture was based on an analysis of successive stylistic phases, thus a classification by date rather than by ownership or iconography. All of this was impregnated

18th-century life at the French court had lost its appeal and had became formal and apathetic. This prompted the intelligentsia to seek relaxation in the salons. This remarkable 18th-century institution was made up of small societies of highly intelligent men and women of different nationalities. They met in the houses of talented female hosts like Madame Geoffrin and Madame du Deffand. The salon broke with the traditional rigid relationship of patron and pensioner system. The atmosphere was truly social, both the aristocracy, the young gallant and above all the self-made and self-educated writers and philosophers mixed freely in conversation. The tone of conversation was civil (l’air galant), a progressive phenomena was that women were also admitted. The salons were to exercise a lasting cultural influence, in this respect they outweighed the French universities which, in contrast to those in Germany or Scotland, only had a remote influence.

592. Cassirer 1966, 278.
593. The Roman Cardinal Alessandro Albani called Winckelmann the greatest antiquary of his time, see: Rehm I, nr.171, p.275.
594. Its popularity stretched outside Germany over several European countries, it appeared in France (1766, 1781, 1784 and 1803), in Italy (1779, 1783 and 1786) and finally in English, though not in a very reliable translation, until the Getty translation of 2006.
with a personal theory of aesthetics and presented as a historical account.\(^{595}\) It is for this reason that he is called the first modern art-historian. Despite the fact that much of his archaeological and art historic theories are now outdated, he has to be credited for his endeavour to understand the ancients from a historic and social context, in an attempt to bring about more coherence between man and art. It marks a turning point in comparison to previous art-historical studies, which traditionally consisted of historic accounts of artist’s lives and where the activities of archaeologists were usually limited to making inventories of different sorts of archaeological objects.

A new approach towards the history of Roman antiquity was provided by Edward Gibbon (1737-1794). In 1763 he embarked on the Grand Tour, as was the tradition amongst young British upper-class men. On his arrival in Rome, which he considered ‘the great object of [my] pilgrimage’, he describes his emotions while walking at the Roman Forum for the first time:

(…) After a sleepless night, I trod, with a lofty step, the ruins of the Forum; each memorable spot where Romulus stood, or Tully spoke, or Caesar fell, was at once present to my eye; and several days of intoxication were lost or enjoyed before I could descend to a cool and minute investigation.\(^{596}\)

It was this intoxication that motivated him to write a history of the city, later extended to the entire empire. Although the book was controversial when it was first published. His scathing view of Christianity (chapters XV and XVI) did not go down well with church authorities and was not easily accepted even among the circles of Enlightened thinkers that Gibbon was acquainted with. In fact it resulted in a ban of the book in several countries. It finally was published under the title: *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1787) and provided a new and more comprehensive understanding of later Roman antiquity. Gibbon insisted on using primary sources and was never content with secondary accounts. As a true enlightened historian Gibbon approached the Christian Church as a phenomenon of general history which was controversial at the time to say the least. At the age of twenty-seven Gibbon took it upon himself to make a study of the history of the Roman empire, that would cover the period from 180 A.D. (the death of Marcus Aurelius) until 1453 (the conquest of Constantinople). The result was a formidable book of 2700 pages! In contrary to what the title of the book suggests, Gibbon was not a pessimist but a sceptic. It is true he described Christianity as the fundamental force against ancient civilisation that uprooted old social ties and even instigated murder and bloodthirstiness, but this does not diminish the fact that nowhere in his book is Christian morality challenged. As a true enlightened optimist he respected sincerity and dedication to (religious) ideals. The *Decline and Fall* was only anti-Christian in the sense that it blamed Christianity for the decline of the Roman Empire. Gibbon was in fact the first to make the history of religion a secular study. In its time the *Decline and Fall* was not only admired by English intellectuals united in the Royal Society, but also in France itself. It was Madame Necker (1739-1794), a leading figure in French intellectual circles who used to entertain some of the *Encyclopédistes* in her house in the Rue de Cléry in Paris, who proclaimed the *Decline and Fall* a bridge between the ancient and the modern

---


\(^{596}\) Gibbon 1966 (*Memoirs*).
world. Due to modern research Gibbon’s book has now lost most of its historical value, although it is still read for its style and admired for its literary skill.597

1. Terminology: Neo-classicism

Neo-classicism is the name for an art style that prevailed during the late eighteenth and early 19th-century. In its heyday during the French Empire it became almost a religion. The stoic virtues of Republican Rome were upheld by the Jacobins as standards not merely for the arts but also for political behaviour and private morality. The affection towards the antique went even as far that children were named after famous men from antiquity, such as Brutus, Solon and Lycurgus. The festivals of the Revolution were staged as antique rituals by influential artists like Jacques-Louis David (1749-1825).598

The phrase Neo-classicism was invented in the mid 19th-century as a derogatory description for what was then thought to be a lifeless, cold and impersonal ‘antique revival’ style -mainly imitations of Greco-Roman antiquity- (ill.1). The eighteenth-century attitude towards antiquity was not only a result but also a cause of the reaction against the preceding Rococo.599 Some art historians perceive Neo-classicism as a new revival of Classical antiquity, more consistent than earlier Classicisms.600 But it has also been argued that in the end all the artists who represent this period differed greatly as well in style as emotion. Some art-historians even doubt whether Neo-classicism may properly be termed a style at all.601 It is striking that neither the term ‘Neo-classicism’ nor even ‘Classicism’ was used in this period to describe it. Critics, theorists and artists themselves called it simply ‘true style’ and referred to it as ‘revival of the arts’ or a risorgimento of the arts.602 Neo-classical artists saw themselves not as mere Greek or Roman revivalists but as restorers of the true style. They strived to reveal the truth that was hidden under the surface of nature. The attitude with which to attain this ideal was cerebral for it was believed that artistic problems could be solved by a purely rational approach.

The latter is an indication of an underlying dilemma, or friction, namely a dualism that was felt in this period between ideal and reality, or rather artistic ideals and sensory perception. The painter Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779) wrote:

597. Fairly recent reprints of the book testify to this. See the abridged edition by D.M. Low from 1976 (ed.princ.1960) and a Dutch translation by P. Syrrier from 2000. English intellectuals of the period strove for the ideal of the ‘chaste and correct’ and the ‘majestic and grave’. By the middle of the 18th-century this cult of symmetry led to the practice of antithesis and ‘the balanced phrase’. The paradoxes present in this concept of antithesis serve as a means to enhance a more critical attitude of the mind. Gibbon was a master in practicing this literary style. His great example was the ancient historian Tacitus, who wrote in a similar literary style.
599. Although the circumstances of the rejection of the Rococo style widely differed from country to country.
600. As defined by Horst Janson 1985, 557. The discovery of the ancient Roman cities of Herculaneum in 1738 and Pompeii in 1748 played an important role in a new appreciation and better understanding of antiquity in general.
601. Rosenblum 1967, 4. Rosenblum deemed Neo-classicism to be far removed from anonymity or repressive uniformity, neither in style or expression.
‘By ideal I mean that which one sees only with the imagination and not with the eyes; thus an ideal in painting depends upon selection of the most beautiful things in nature purified of every imperfection’.  

This dualism between reality, or nature, and the ideal was resolved by a naturalistic interpretation of Classical antique art and sculpture in particular. The idealisation of nature through selection of the most perfect parts as an art-concept is found with several ancient writers. This is why Classical art became to be regarded as the highest and most true form of naturalism.

Winckelmann did a lot to enhance the understanding of Classical art. Although the influence he had was probably stronger on writers and patrons than on artists. He is famous for the expression ‘edle Einfalt und stille Grösse’ (noble simplicity and serene greatness). With it, completely in line with Enlightenment thinking, he wanted to express the outstanding qualities of antique art. Winckelmann’s attitude as an art-theorist is determined by an aversion of a superficial flush, he believed that the essence was to be able to see truth (Wahrheit). Peculiar but nevertheless characteristic for the period is also his aesthetic theory in regard to the processes that unfold when one is observing art. It entails a contrast between beauty (Schönheit) and lust (Wollust):

‘This is caused by our lustful desires, which in most people are aroused at first sight, and the pleasures of the senses are satisfied when the mind attempts to enjoy beauty: subsequently it is not beauty that overtakes us, but lust’.

---

603. As quoted by Honour 1975, 105.
605. E.g. Xen., An., III, x. 2., Cic., Inv.rhet., II, 1-3.
606. For discussion on the concept of noble nature (Goethe) see: Honour 1975, 106
607. The expression edlen Einfalt und stillen Grösse was not newly invented by Winckelmann. Noble simplicité was already an established slogan in French aesthetics, but also common in the German translation. For elaboration see: Baumecker 1933. According to Ulrike Götz (1996, 482) Winckelmann derived his slogan from the English art theoretician Jonathan Richardson who used the phrase to summarise Greek art.
608. There were many poets and scholars who engaged themselves in the scientific study of human nature. E.g. in 1732 the English poet Alexander Pope wrote An Essay on the Nature and State of Man, with respect to Himself as an Individual, in which he stated ‘The proper study of mankind is man’, see: Butt 1980, 516. Locke wrote an Essay concerning human understanding (1690), Hume an Inquiry concerning human understanding (1739 and 1748), Kant made epistemology the cornerstone of his philosophy.
609. Winckelmann 1934, 140. [tr. Godin], the original text reads: Die Ursache liegt in unseren Lüsten, welche bei den mehresten Menschen durch den ersten Blick erregt werden, und Sinnlichkeit ist schon angefüllt, wenn der Verstand suchen wolte, das Schöne zu geniessen: alsdann ist es nicht die Schönheit die uns einnimt, sondern die Wollust. Although Sinnlichkeit should be perceived here as a sublimated form of lust (Wollust). The passage that is referred to is characteristic for the general attitude during this period, the dilemma that Winckelmann adresses here is closely related to his personal predicament. A lot of theories have been concocted about Winckelmann’s homosexuality. But notwithstanding his interest for athletic young men, so evident in many of his letters, he seems to have sublimated his passions in an ongoing quest for Classical values. A good evaluation of the matter is to be found in Van Dolen & Moormann 1993, 29-35, with extensive bibliographical references. Also see: Potts 1994 passim. For a depreciative evaluation of his personality see: Butler 1958, 11-48. The sublimation of lust is rather controversial, or peculiar to say the least, this because of the concern with the afffective qualities of works of art that is so predominant in Winckelmann’s descriptions of ancient statues.
The background from which such attitudes evolved has been explained from the status quo during the Enlightenment in the second half of the 18th-century, that was opposed to sensuousness, which after all represents a world of uncontrolled passions that is beyond rationality.610 It is also one of the reasons that Enlightenment thinkers rejected Classical mythology. The ancient gods with their frivolous love affairs and intrigues, a subject matter much favoured by Rococo artists, were considered corrupt and immoral.611

By the end of the 18th-century there were only few painters or sculptors who cared to express the ‘old’ vision of antiquity. The gods, fauns and satyrs receded into the background (ill.3) and they survived in art as personifications of physical beauty. Now, their place was taken by great men, like warriors, lawgivers and great philosophers of antiquity (ill.4). Popular themes represented heroic actions of virtuous men whose acts served as ethical examples and were to lift morality (ill.5). Yet the anti-Rococo trend in painting was, when it started, a matter of content rather than style.612 (ill.6) As a result of this art-criticism became a kind of fictitious natural scientific observation in line with aesthetic concepts of the Enlightenment philosophy.613

Yet Neo-classicism as an art-style is not void of romantic tendencies, for it was not only influenced by truth and reason but also by emotion.614 In the first phase one could speak of Pre-Romantic or Romantic Classicism. But this never became a generally accepted term. Moreover in 18th-century aesthetics there also exist subjective trends which emphasise the inadequacy of logic and leave more room for individual emotions.615 The Swiss / Anglo painter John Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) had a preoccupation with the domain of the illogical, the erotic, and the bizarre. In his work The Nightmare (ill.7) a stylistic synthesis is achieved between the Classical and the Gothic. On the subject matter Fuseli stated: ‘one of the most unexplored regions of art are dreams. 616 This quest for terrifying experiences, which lead him

610. Laub 1992, 241ff. His article is dealing with questions on truth observation and sensuousness.
611. Rousseau is a representative of this attitude; in 1750 he wrote: ‘Our gardens are adorned with statues and our galleries with pictures. What would you imagine that these masterpieces of art, thus held up to public admiration, represent? The men who have defended their country, or those still greater who have enriched it by their genius? No. They are images of every perversion of heart and mind, drawn ingeniously from ancient mythology and presented to the early curiosity of our children, doubtless that they may have before their eyes models of vicious actions, even before they have learned to read’ (as quoted by Honour 1975, 44). In Emile Rousseau even seems to deny any biological basis to human sexuality: sex is purely and simply the creation of human psychology (Emile IV, 333). Though it has to be noted that Rousseau’s attitude towards sexuality is complex and his criticisms have a controversial character, see: Schwartz (1950) 2ff.
612. Despite this enlightened moralism the emphasis on science as a means to contribute to the emancipation of man also spurred the exploration of the erotic realm. One could think of the early Neo-classicism of Vien (1716-1809) whose paintings represent an amoral eroticism that has been called Roman-Rococo. Or the post-revolutionary pornographic drawings of Fuseli (1741-1825) that represent a more extreme exploration of erotic experiences. And last but not least his exact contemporary, the writer / philosopher Marquis de Sade whose books describe a pornotopia, which caused them to be prohibited, burned and banished.
613. Laub 1992, 242. But this scientific ideal of objectivity did not prevent Diderot’s remarks in his Essay on Painting which seem to leave room for more subjective emotions: ‘Begone sophist!, you will never persuade my heart that it should not palpate or my bosom that it should not be moved’ (as quoted by Cassirer 1966, 299).
614. One could bring to mind the ‘the cult of sensibility’. In 1765 Diderot demanded of painters: ‘Move me, astonish me, break my heart, let me tremble, weep, stare, be enraged - you will delight my eyes afterwards, if you can’.
615. See Cassirer 1966, 278ff. For the interplay between Classicism and contrary forces, see: Schenk 1966, chapt. I. Also see: Guardini 1948, 243, esp. note 1.
616. Knowles, 1831, iii, 145, Aphorism 231.
to the dark recesses of the mind, made Fuseli a transitional figure between Neo-classicism and Romanticism. One should realise that despite the differences in style several Neo-classicists and early Romantics were contemporaries. For instance David and Goya were born within a few years of each other. 617

In the end the apparent dichotomy between ‘Nature’ and the ‘Ideal’ was resolved by a naturalistic interpretation of antique Classical art. Although Classical art was highly valued by Neo-classical artists who regarded it as a great idealistic example that had to be followed, a sharp distinction was made between ‘copy’ and ‘imitation’. What one did not want was a mere slavishly copying of nature that would result into styles like the 17th-century Dutch genre- and still-life-painting, which was strongly rejected at the time (although it was greatly appreciated by clients). For Neo-classicist artists imitation involved higher faculties, especially invention. 618 A representative of this attitude was Henry Fuseli who criticised artists who slavishly copied the antique and worked in what he called a ‘marble style’. For him they were just feebleminded transcribers of the dead letter, unable to convey the great spirit of the ancients.

2. The public museums as an instrument of education

During the course of the 18th-century we see two developments in the realm of collecting. The concept of an encyclopaedic collection, which was so fashionable in the 16th- and 17th-century, only gained more popularity among collectors. Previously a private collection with rare objects -curiosity cabinets- was also called a museum. But more and more the word museum referred to a public institution, systematically laid out and assigned by a ruler, parliament or university to enlighten the general public and to stimulate the arts and sciences. A specialisation set in where curiosities and scientific objects and instruments were separated from art objects like paintings and sculptures. Moreover the scientific revolution that evolved between 1600 and 1750 gave rise to various scholarly societies. These new institutions started new collections that often differed from private collections.

Another force that tied up Neo-classicism to the Enlightenment and urged the rise of museums as an institution was the belief in the educational mission of artists. Influential was Denis Diderot’s (1713-1784) philosophy of art that very strongly emphasised the moral commitment of an artist. He is known to have stated:

‘To make virtue attractive, vice odious, ridicule forceful: that is the aim of every honest man who takes up the pen, the brush or the chisel’. 619

A similar moralistic attitude in regard to architecture is found in Johann Georg Sulzer’s art encyclopaedia of 1771:

617. Horst Janson (1985, 557) pointed out that Romanticism should not be regarded as a specific style but more an attitude of mind that may reveal itself in many ways, thus a wider concept and therefore much more difficult to define.

618. Other statements of how artists regarded imitation of Classical art are found with the painter Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792): (..)‘The practice of imitation is a perpetual exercise of the mind, a continual invention’, (as quoted by Honour 1975, 107). Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779) wrote: ‘But he who effectively studies and observes the productions of great men with the true desire to imitate them, makes himself capable of producing works which resemble them, because he considers the reasons with which they are done (...) and this makes him an imitator without being a plagiarist’ (as quoted by Honour 1975, 107).

619. As quoted by Honour 1975, 80.
Bad buildings which have been planned or constructed without order or intelligence or which are over laden with foolish, grotesque, or exuberant decoration necessarily have a bad effect on the mentality of the people.\footnote{620}{Sulzer 1771, 129 (tr. Honour 1975, 81). The original text reads: \textit{Schlechte, ohne Ordnung und Verstand entworfene und aufgeführte, oder mit närrischen, abentheuerlichen, oder ausschweizenden zierrathen überladene Gebäude, die in einem Hande allgemein sind, haben unfehlbar eine schlimme Wirkung auf die Denkungsart des Volks.}\ Johann Georg Sulzer (1720-1779) was a tutor at the Berlin Academy and also wrote a book on the theory of child education. His architectural theory is entirely based on Vitruvian axioms: \textit{Die Theorie der Baukunst muss demnach zuerst diejenige Regeln angeben, wodurch ein Gebäude sowol im ganzen, als in seinen Theilen richtig, ordentlich, natürlich und ohne Fehler wird. Diese sind grösstentheils in den folgenden Artikeln begriffen: Richtigkeit, Regelmässigkeit, Zusammenhang, Ordnung, Gleichformigkeit, Eurythmie} (Sulzer 1771, 132).}

Attitudes like these lead to a greater emphasis on the intellectual training of artists and, in the visual arts, encouraged the creation of history painting, with heavy moralistic overtones.\footnote{621}{The \textit{Encyclopédie} article \textit{Intéressant} states that a work of art owes its interest to its moral and social content and the artist must therefore be both \textit{philosophe et honnête homme}.} This development was also stimulated, and to some extent the result, by changes in the education system for artists.

In the course of the 18\textsuperscript{th}-century academies more and more replaced the artist’s studio as the main school where young artists were trained (\textit{ill.8}). The change in the education process of the artists resulted in a greater emphasis on theory and less on craftsmanship, as was the case in the master’s studio. All this urged the demand for a public museum as an instrument of education. As a result these developments caused a different attitude towards great royal art collections. Until then royal collections were regarded as mainly status symbols and in some respect the regalia of the monarch. In France there were pleas since 1747 for the establishment of a royal museum in Paris as a remedy for the decadence of history painting. This resulted in 1750 to the opening of some rooms in the Luxembourg Palace with more than one hundred paintings, admissible twice a week for the general public and practically open at any time for the students of the \textit{École Royale}.

The French Revolution (1789-92) caused private art collections, which previously belonged to the king, the church or the aristocracy, to be handed over to the nation. The museum as an instrument of education was one of the ideas propagated by the Revolution. The museological projects of the Ancien Régime were realised on a much vaster scale than had been intended.\footnote{622}{Bazin 1967, 169.} The Convention decreed that all the works of art from over the whole of France to be confiscated and sent to a few main warehouses. In most cases these were former convents utilised for this purpose. Here special deputies were put at work to catalogue the art objects. Regrettably preservation went hand in hand with the act of destruction. Many works of art with feudal, religious or royal subjects were forbidden by law and subsequently destroyed, broken down or burned. A law of November 19, 1792 ordered that all art objects confiscated in the royal households be sent to the Louvre, the latter opened as a museum in 1793 (\textit{ill.9}). Action was taken to safeguard the collections and to describe the works of art they contained. In five university towns in France projects were set up to found adjunct museums to the benefit of the schools of art. Jean Antoine Chaptal, the minister of interior, decided that the provinces should also benefit from the abundance of art in the Louvre. On September 1, 1800 he submitted a report to the consulate. He envisioned the distribution of the different art collections: ‘to places where education has prepared the public to appreciate them and where a large population and native dispositions will predict success in the
formation of students’. 623 This resulted in a bill signed by Napoleon by which fifteen cities in the territory of the republic were allocated to receive works of art. 624 In addition to this the French Republic stimulated the opening of museums in the conquered territories.

Despite the turbulent evolution of the public museum as an instrument of education after the French Revolution, the French were not the first who started the concept of a public museum. One has to realise that by 1780 the collections of the French king were still spread out over several locations that were rather inaccessible for the public. The paintings of Louis XVI were still in Versailles, the naturalia in the Jardin des Plantes while the antique sculptures were for one part in the Louvre and for the other in different gardens.

By this time several more or less public museums supported by the authorities existed in different European cities. For instance the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford opened in 1683 (though primarily to the benefit of the School of Natural History), the British Museum in 1759, the Zwinger in Dresden (which housed the art and curiosity collections of August the Strong and his son August III) opened in 1746, the rooms of the Rotunda in the Vatican in 1780, the Museo Pio-Clementino opened in 1772 (ill.10), and the Fredericianum in Kassel was opened to the public in 1779. By the end of the 1770s the Galleria Degli Uffizi in Florence was reorganised, and set up explicitly as a museum for painting and classical sculpture. The naturalia and scientific instruments were separated and housed in a specialised museum. In the same period the Belvedere in Vienna was likewise reorganised, the curiosities were removed and only the paintings of the former königliche Bildergalerie were left and systematically presented in different schools of painting (ill.11).

Whether these museums were located in specially designed buildings or remained part of a palace, they were meant to be seen by the public, in order to enlighten art lovers and help artists in their studies. Although admission was not always as easily obtained as the word ‘public’ suggests. The British Museum only granted admission after a written request was made and after a long period of waiting. In Dresden one had to make an appointment with a custodian who expected to be paid a large gratuity. The Musée National in Paris distinguished between artists and ordinary visitors: a major part of the week was exclusively reserved for the artists to study the artworks. 625 The museum in Kassel however was open during regular hours.

In the 18th-century the museum had become one of the fundamental institutions of the modern state. From the very beginning plastercasts formed an integral part of the collections. In some cases entire exhibition rooms or even whole floors were reserved to display the plasters.

3. French spoils of war and the Atelier de Moulages in Paris

In 1794, during the French army’s campaign in the Low Countries, the revolutionary administration in Paris proclaimed the principle that the Louvre museum was the rightful home for all masterpieces of art that were seized from conquered territory. 626 Special

624. These were: Paris, Bordeaux, Caen, Dijon, Lille, Lyon, Marseilles, Nancy, Nantes, Rennes, Rouen, Strasbourg, Toulouse, Brussels and Genova.
626. On art confiscation under Napoleon, see: MacKay Quynn 1944, Gould 1965, Wescher 1976. Germain Bazin (1967, 183) pointed out that ‘the political ideology of revolutionary and Napoleonic France was encyclopedic and European in its aims’. Among others the result was that several cities in the different departments of the empire were chosen to support a regional museum. As a consequence many national collections were realized. Significant is that when Napoleon had become emperor he
commissars that followed the victorious French armies assembled all artworks of any importance and sent them to Paris as spoils of war. In this way many Flemish pictures were seized and added to the Louvre collection. But also from other conquered states many items of artistic and scientific nature were brought to France. Peace treaties stipulated that the property of a ruler was at the disposal of the conqueror be it with certain exceptions (private collections were not to be touched) which de facto legalised plunder.

In April 1796, the French armies under the command of General Bonaparte invaded Italy. In June 1796 an armistice with the Pope’s delegates at Bologna was signed. Under article 8 one hundred works of art were to be handed over, most of which were antique sculptures. The interest in these sculptures was more than purely aesthetic, for the revival of antiquity spurred by Neo-classicism had assumed moral aspects during the Revolution. Among the seized works of Classical antique art were the most renowned sculptures from the Pio-Clementino, the Palazzo dei Conservatori, the Capitoline museums and the Villa Albani in Rome. As a substitute plaster casts were put on display in the Vatican and on the Capitol to replace the marble originals. In 1798 the bulk of the pictures and antiquities the French commissioners in Rome had selected reached Paris. The transport on wagons pulled by oxen (ill.12) over land had been long, laborious and expensive. The original plan to send them by ship was cancelled for fear of English interception. Their entry turned into a triumphal procession à la romaine. Arriving in the Champ de Mars, the wagons hauling all the trophies formed a circle; there were ceremonial speeches and a military band. Although all of the statues were still left in their wooden packing cases and the only ones visible were the four Horses of St. Mark’s. On the ground floor of the Louvre museum nine rooms were set apart to exhibit the ancient works of art thematically (ill.13+14a, b). The transportation to France of paintings and antiquities seized in Italy was both condoned and vehemently opposed. For example Jacques-Louis David and other lovers of Rome signed a petition in protest to this act and sent to the Directory. But this was to no avail for it was determined that Paris was to be the art capital of Europe. An additional positive effect was that all this instigated the restoration of many works of art, since most paintings were in a state of decay, never having been attended to since their creation.

The prestige and admiration of the Italian antique statues only increased during their stay in Paris. This was not merely due to the novel circumstances of display or because of the lavish official catalogue that was published. It was the plaster casts that played a vital role in the process of spreading their fame. Although it had become a public museum earlier, the Louvre incorporated an Atelier de Moulages (workshop for plaster casting) (ill.15a, b, c, d). From here plaster casts were sent all over Europe and even as far as the United States. They were taken not only from originals in the museum-collection but also from moulds of statues in other collections, as was the case with the head of Niobe or the hands and feet of the Farnese Hercules.

gave kingdoms to his relatives, who soon engaged themselves in founding museums in their respective capitals. E.g. Louis, king of Holland from 1806 to 1810 founded the Koninklijk Museum (which formed the basis of today’s Rijksmuseum). This museum was set up in the former town hall of Amsterdam which Louis transformed into his royal palace. On art confiscation, see: MacKay Quynn 1944; Gould 1978.

Among these were: the Apollo Belvedere, the Laocoon, the Belvedere Torso, the Cleopatra, the Antinous, the Nile, the Tiber, the Spinario, the Cupid and Psyche and the Dying Gladiator. For elaboration see: Haskell & Penny 1982, 108ff. For the Villa Albani, see: Beck & Bol 1981-1984

Flaxman 1838, 21. Although the Perseus by Antonio Canova was put on de pedestal of the Apollo Belvedere.

Haskell & Penny 1982, 114.
The Treaty of Paris (1815) was to restore the peace between the Great Powers of Europe. One of the results was that the despoiled countries sent art agents to Paris to retrieve their confiscated works of art. But this did not go smoothly, for the restitution did not affect works on permanent loan from the Louvre museum to the provinces. As a result of this certain foreign cities (Genova, Mainz and especially Brussels) retained what had been previously allocated to them. Other works changed owners and did not return to their home-cities. Artworks that were confiscated from ecclesiastical institutions and placed in museums were often never returned. In the few cases that these were returned they were used to set up new public museums.

Thanks to financial aid from the British government the antique sculptures and other artworks were returned to Italy. The sculptor Antonio Canova was appointed to supervise the restitution of all the artworks to the Papacy. After difficulties of every kind the wagons, carrying what still were the most renowned antique sculptures in the world, arrived in Rome on the fourth of January 1816. But not all the artworks returned. This was due to political motives, for the Pope was anxious not to antagonise the reinstated Louis XVIII who was a member of the Bourbon family. It was their determination to reverse the anti-clericalism of the Revolution and the Caesarism of Napoleon, which caused several pictures and antique sculptures to remain in France.

In some cases Italian noble families, like the Braschi, were compensated for the removal of their possessions. Others like the Albani found the expense of transporting their antiquities to Rome to be prohibitive and contented themselves with a single piece: the Antinous Bas-Relief.

4. New archaeological museums and private collections

The systematic excavations of Herculaneum, Pompeii and Stabiae started in 1738, 1748 and 1749. It marked the beginning of scientific field-archaeology. Although in the beginning the attitude of the excavators was not so much determined by systematic excavation but more by searching objects in order to enlarge existing collections (like was the case with the collection of the king of Naples for instance). A more scientific method is found with the Swiss excavator Karl Jacob Weber (1712-1764), who was praised by Winckelmann. Weber's new and almost revolutionary approach could be summarised in three words: excavation method, documentation and publication.630

The increasing interest in antiquity encouraged the founding of learned societies that organised excavations and founded museums to exhibit the excavated objects. For example the so-called Etruscan Society, founded in Cortona in 1726, or the Sicilian town of Catania where Prince Biscari erected a magnificent palace of which one wings was reserved for the use as a museum filled with antiquities that were either excavated locally or obtained in Rome, Naples or Florence. It was opened in 1758.

In England the first national archaeological museum whose origins were not rooted in a royal collection was established in 1753: the British Museum. Beside its library that originally was made up of more than eighty thousand volumes, it also contained many antique objects. Renowned were the vases and marble statues, bequests from the former Hamilton and Towneley collections.631 The highlight of the museum’s collection are the so-called Elgin marbles from the Parthenon temple in Athens, which were obtained in 1816.

631. During his lifetime Charles Towneley (1737-1805) was an ardent amateur collector. His collection of antique marbles, reliefs and coins was deposited in two houses in Parkstreet, Westminster, London.
In Rome by the beginning of the 18th-century many collections of antiquities were sold off, either because they had lost their appeal for the impoverished noble families or because they were regarded as a symbol of nepotism. Between 1720 and 1728 several large collections disappeared from Rome and were sold en masse or in parts and often ended up abroad.\(^{632}\)

However after a century of indifference to amateurism the popes resumed a vigorous patronage of the arts, conscious of their ‘cultural’ commitments as heads of the pontifical state. Cardinals like Neri, Corsini, Borgia, Valenti and Albani amassed new collections of antiquities. In 1733, to safeguard the collection of Cardinal Alessandro Albani (1692-1779), pope Clemens XII Corsini obtained this collection. It consisted of about 400 statues and busts and was added to the collection of the Capitol (started in 1586). This enlarged collection opened in 1734 under the name *Museo Capitolino*. The aim was to create a museum centre where for the first time the objects were exhibited in a systematic way according to a program. For instance there was a room with philosophers and one with emperors. The *Museo Capitolino* marked a shift in the way one encountered ancient classical art.

After Cardinal Albani’s collection was added to the Capitoline collection he soon started another with the help of Winckelmann and accommodated it in his newly built Casino, the *Villa Albani*. Here also we see a new way in which the antiquities were exhibited. The plans were drawn up by Winckelmann and his friend, the painter Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779). It involved a thematic arrangement of the objects, all in harmony with the architectural style of the exhibition rooms.

In 1768 the Vatican was extended with more exhibition rooms. The *Museo Pio-Clementino* opened in 1772. The new criteria were also applied here, like the systematic arrangement of the objects according to theme and subject, like the Sala dei Busti (ill.16a). The architects who drew up the plans for these exhibition rooms worked in a Neo-classical style inspired by ancient Roman architecture. The works of art were placed in their architectural settings as decorative pieces. A good example is the Sala Rotunda of the *Museo Pio-Clementino* designed by Michelangelo Simonetti (ill.16b). Here the statuary was presented in a setting similar to that for which it had been created -its design was based on the model of the Pantheon in Rome-. All in all the museum represented the first step to a more scientific approach to Classical antiquity and of a rational attitude toward museum management. Moreover, its Neo-classical architecture furnished the canon for museums of antiquities for more than half the century.\(^{633}\)

The antiquities in these museums gained more popularity than they already had through the travellers ‘on Tour’ who visited these museums. Enlightened rulers on the other hand aspired to obtain original ancient sculpture or had to be content with copies in marble, bronze or casts in terracotta or plaster. The popularity of collecting plaster copies of ancient sculpture is evident from Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s *Italienische Reise*. He set up a small plaster collection in Rome during his visit there in 1786.\(^{634}\) Goethe also deplored that for the

---

\(^{632}\) Despite controls on the exportation of antique works of art, Rome lost many of her collections. In 1720, 1,300 pieces of sculpture passed from the Giustiniani collection into the hands of the Earl of Pembroke. The Odescalchi, Chigi, Massimo and Mattei collections were absorbed into the collections of Frederick II of Prussia, Catherine the Great and the Duke d’Orléans. The Medici treasures were carted off to Florence and those in the Palazzo Farnese to Naples, see: Bazin 1967, 166; Beck 1981, passim

\(^{633}\) Bazin 1967, 167.

sake of study purposes the pope did not have plaster casts made of all the statues that were exported out of the country.\footnote{Goethe \textit{Italienische Reise}, entry 22-1-1787, \textit{Werke} (1993), 175.} We know of the \textit{Rostische Kunsthandlung} in Leipzig that manufactured plaster casts. In 1794 the firm published a catalogue elaborately illustrated with copper engravings. Casts of free standing sculpture taken from antique sculpture, life size or small scale, busts and reliefs were put on offer with the prices added to them.\footnote{Rost 1794 (ed.princ.1786, without illustrations). The catalogue could be bought with or without the 54 copper engravings. Most of the plaster casts were taken from the highlights of antique sculpture although some from the Italian Renaissance. On demand one could be provided with a special polish to give the plaster cast the effect of coloured marble.} ‘To promote good taste and for the study of art’, as Rost states in his introduction.

5. The craze of collecting casts and copies of antique statues

By the end of the 17th century the tradition of collecting casts and copies of all the finest antique statues in Italy was firmly established. In this respect Louis XIV had become an exemplary figure for the whole of Europe. He continued this tradition which had started in the Renaissance and commissioned marble copies of all the famous ancient statues found in Italy. Moreover he commissioned a series with the highlights of Classical sculpture cast in plaster made for the French academy in Rome and Paris. As a result of this the \textit{Mercure Galant} of 1682 wrote: ‘One could say that Italy is in France and that Paris is a new Rome’.\footnote{Quoted by Bastet in De Leeuw 1984, 184. \textit{Le Mercure Galant} was a literary journal that covered the arts, it was founded in the first half of the 17th century in Paris.} The French king not only set the norm for the prevailing taste that every other sovereign attempted to emulate, but was also an example for aristocrats and other individual collectors in the 18th-century.

More than other Europeans, the English played an important role in the continuation and revival of the interest in the antique. Sophisticated English society instigated the taste for antiquities. A related phenomenon, which boosted the demand for copies and casts, was the Grand Tour. Whether it originated out of a feeling of insularity and cultural backwardness that drew the British onto the Continent is open to debate. Anyhow the Grand Tour was a European travel itinerary that started at the beginning of the late 16th-century and was continued until far into the 19th-century. Originally it was a fashion amongst young British upper-class men and served as an educational rite of passage for wealthy university graduates. But later it became a tradition which introduced Englishmen, Germans, Scandinavians, and also Americans to the art and culture of France and Italy.

The term Grand Tour first appeared in a printed work: the \textit{Voyage to Italy} by Richard Lassell (1760). The education of an English gentleman or German princeling was considered not complete until he had undertaken a Grand Tour. Such a journey took months or even years and took the traveller along the most important cities of Europe. The highlight was Rome, the eternal city where with the aid of a travel-guide or under the supervision of a \textit{cicerone} (guide) one was able to appreciate the most famous buildings, statues and paintings. Some made their own observations, for example ground plans of buildings were bought and when these were not available one would take measurements and make drawings. A Grand Tour was by no

\textit{Gesang Homers}. Although he regrets the loss of what he regarded as expression of a statue. What first appeared as \textit{Zauber} in marble was \textit{kreidehaft und todt} in plaster (\textit{Italienische Reise}, entry 25-12-1786, \textit{Werke} (1993, 161). Here we notice the adoration characteristic for this period for white marble. Goethe like his contemporaries -Winckelmann- was not aware that the ancient Greek and Roman statues were originally painted in bright colours.
means merely an art-trip. For it was not only a training for diplomats, public servants and soldiers, but also an ideal means of acquiring taste, knowledge, self assurance and polished manners suitable for a young gentleman of fortune. Moreover, it became also accepted as an invaluable alternative, or supplement, to a university education. This was due to the discredit into which English universities had fallen in the course of the 18th-century.

The Society of Dilettanti was founded in London in 1739. Her object was to ‘encourage at home a taste for those objects which had contributed so much to [the tourists] entertainment abroad’. A dilettante, or amateur, was someone who delighted in the arts—in those days the word dilettante did not have the patronising connotations that it has nowadays. To be a dilettante continued an old tradition in English society namely that of the virtuoso. In the 17th-century men of learning and knowledge who involved themselves with art as well as science were called virtuosi. Virtuosi in the 18th-century tended to call themselves dilettantes; anyhow it was the continuation of the Renaissance ideal of the *uomo universale*.

In the course of the 17th- and 18th-centuries it became more and more important for a gentleman to be cultivated as well as literate. Greek and Roman civilisation continued to be considered the basis of modern civilisation (ill.17). This was also expressed in country houses of the time that had to demonstrate culture. It was therefore these dilettantes that contributed greatly to a souvenir industry in Italy since etiquette required them to take a souvenir back home. If one could afford it this would be a painting, or a portrait done in Rome by an artist like Pompeo Batoni, with a capriccio of ancient ruins in the background (ill.18). Great sculpture collections with renowned antique and contemporary statues were visited. The antique statues had become highly collectable status symbols to be incorporated in private domestic collections, but also for decorative purposes used as interior- or garden decorations (ill.19). The great collection of plaster casts in the *Palazzo Mancini* in the Via del Corso in Rome had great attraction for foreign visitors.

By the middle of the century, the demand for casts and copies had increased so much that a souvenir industry emerged, especially in Rome. Private collectors, often dilettantes, would, within the limits of their budget, collect copies in marble or bronze, but less expensive casts in led or plaster were also purchased (ill.20). In Rome Grand Tour travellers could obtain copies and casts of Greek and Roman statues—often fakes—from dealers who swarmed around them. Sculptors or metal casters like Giovanni Zoffoli or Francesco Righetti, or the obscure Giuseppe Boschi put out catalogues with printed lists of copies (ill.21a+b). Real scale or smaller versions, in marble and bronze, but also casts in led or plaster that were made available for clients. A wide range of small bronze copies at a price attractive to the ordinary gentleman traveller was commercially manufactured. Righetti is known not only to produce sets of copies of antique and modern statues, but also busts, vases, animals, ormolu clock ornaments, and marble pedestals. The Roman goldsmith Luigi Valadier who died in 1785, made lavish dessert sets with miniature reproductions of antique statues and temples. Although ceramic copies of antique statues were rare at first, an early example is an earthware copy of the *Venus Medici* by the Marchese Carlo Ginori’s porcelain factory at Doccia (ill.22). By 1785 the engraver Giovanni Volpato opened a workshop in the Via Pudenziana in Rome where little biscuit figurines were produced (ill.23). These copied other bronze sets that were sold by people like Righetti. A contemporary observation by a certain Baron d’Uklanski reads: ‘At this depot you may now have the finest things of this description which interest the

---

638. For the role of the Virtuoso in the 17th century see: Houghton 1942.
639. Girouard 1980, 180. Uneducated country gentlemen could still be found, but they were much criticized by their own class. Country houses had porticoes and pediments that could be a symbol of culture as well as of state.
640. Haskell & Penny 1982, 94.
dilettante and do not disgrace even an elegant drawing room. The pope’s sculptor and chief restorer of antiquities Bartolomeo Cavaceppi produced, aided by some fifty sculptors, many marble copies of ancient sculpture in his studio in Rome that is depicted on the frontispiece of his *Raccolta* which was published in 1768. Interesting is the depiction of a pointing machine or copy cage that was used by sculptors for copying sculptures (ill. 24, 25a+b).

Art academies and drawing schools also played an important role since they too collected plaster copies not only for didactic purposes but also to enlarge the prestige and royal patronage of the academy (ill. 26). Several plaster collections were set up at royal academies all over Europe, from Berlin to Stockholm. Goethe reports of his visit to the *Mannheimer Antikensaal*. Here he had his first encounter with plaster statues that left a strong impression for he gives an account of it in 1771. He praised the way in which the plaster casts were exhibited, in a room with high windows:

(…) The finest statues of antiquity were not just placed in rows along the walls, but displayed at random across the entire floor surface (…) All these fine creations could be exposed to light in the most favourable way by means of opening or closing curtains, moreover they were placed on mobile pedestals that could be moved and turned around as one pleased.

Goethe’s contempory, the philosopher Lessing, was of the opinion that there were great advantages to plaster copies in comparison to the originals. This is affirmed by a remark of Friedrich Schiller in 1777:

(…) Lessing claimed that a visit to this plaster hall of antiquities [in Mannheim] was more beneficiary to young artists then a pilgrimage to the originals in Rome, where they were often hidden in darkness or placed too high or to low, quite impracticable for the proper use by the expert, who wants to be able to touch them and observe them from different angles.

Another early example is the acquisition shortly after 1682 of a series of plaster casts from France by the Hague academy in Holland. Or the drawing school *Felix Meritis*, founded in 1777 in Amsterdam, that owned a substantial collection of plasters.


642. Humbert de Superville (1770-1849) who during his stay in Rome did some sketch work in Cavaceppi’s studio described him as: ‘(…) also a merchant and trader in antiquities, of which he owned many, spoilt many by restoring them and fobbed off many on the English; sometimes, however, he had some good things’ (tr. Jaap Bolten 1997).

643. The plasterstatues from this collection that was founded in 1796 were owned by the drawing academy in Mannheim, they came for the most part from the art academy in Düsseldorf.

644. Goethe 1890, Abt.1 Bd.28, 85. (tr. Godin.). The original text reads: (…) ‘die herrlichsten Statuen des Alterthums [waren] nicht allein an den Wänden gereiht, sondern auch innerhalb der ganzen Fläche durch einander aufgestellt (…) Alle diese herrlichen Gebilde konnten durch Auf- und Zuziehen der Vorhänge in das vorteilhaftesten Licht gestellt werden; überdiesel waren sie auf Postamenten beweglich und Belieben zu wenden und zu drehen’.

At the time plaster collections invoked feelings of an almost religious pathos among visitors, many examples testify to this. When, for instance, the young Swiss artist Johan Conrad Gessner had visited the plaster collection in Dresden at the 21st of April 1786 (ill.27a,b,c), he wrote to his father:

(\ldots) ‘How astonished I was when I was at the presence of these figures for the first time. Words fall short to tell you my feelings with all this. What beauty, sublimity and grandeur of the heroes in general, what expression and what spirit’. 646

Similar was the reaction of the poet Friedrich Schiller after his visit to the Mannheimer Antikensaal in 1784:

(\ldots) ‘Today I have had an exceptionally pleasant surprise. It moved my soul. It made me feel more noble and better’. 647

The Danish painter Asmus Jakob Carstens, of whom his biographer reports that when he visited the plaster collection in Copenhagen in 1776 he was overwhelmed with emotion:

(\ldots) Everything I have seen of art so far seemed only the work of humans (\ldots) but these figures appeared to be like higher beings, created by a super human art (\ldots) Here I saw for the first time the Vatican Apollo, the Laokoon, the Farnese Hercules, the Borghese Gladiator and others, and I was overwhelmed with a sacred feeling of adoration that almost moved me to tears’. 648

All these reactions express a general enthusiasm for antiquity. Yet it also confirms the fact that plaster as a material has a special property, namely the ability to material abstraction, to convey a realistic feeling and at the same time intensify the ‘message’ of the original. 649

6. Glyptic art

The great collections from the Renaissance period traditionally contained gems both from antiquity as from contemporary masters. Famous is the collection of Lorenzo de’ Medici that was made up of some 3000 stones. Most of the encyclopaedic collections in the 16th century like those of François I or of the Uffizi in Florence, also included gems. They became a traditional component of an art- or curiosity cabinet. In Amsterdam, Jacob de Wilde (1645-1721), who was a treasurer for the admiralty, owned a ‘museum’ made up of antiquities; among them was a substantial collection of gems. 650 (ill.28+29)

\footnotesize 646. The original text reads: \ldots ‘Von welchem Erstaunen ward ich ergriffen, als ich das erste Mal in der Mitte dieser herrlichen Figuren mich befand! Ich finde keine Worte, um Ihnen zu sagen, was ich bey diesem Alles fühlte. Welche Schönheit, Erhabenheit und welche Seele!’ As quoted by Cain 1995, 206.


650. Part of the collection was published by De Wilde in a catalogue entitled Gemmae Selectae Antiquae e Museo Jacobi de Wilde [...], Amsterdam 1703.
During the 18th- and 19th-century gem impressions in plaster and other materials became extremely popular. Because they were produced on an industrial scale they were relatively cheap and easy to come by. Especially the ones in plaster have to be considered as part of the widespread ‘cult of plaster’ that prevailed during this period. Not only do they have scientific importance for archaeological research, but they also played a role in the cultivation of the more popular knowledge of the antique in general. These impressions, which depicted mythological scenes and portrayed famous men like philosophers and emperors, found their way into private homes. They were displayed in beautifully executed boxes or display cases, not only as objects of interior decoration but also as collectors items in order to cultivate knowledge of the antique. It was Goethe who at the end of his life (1829) commented on their value to promote art, taste and aesthetic appreciation.

There are two main types of carving. One type is called intaglio (from the Italian intagliare, which means to carve or engrave), where in a precious or semi-precious stone the picture is cut or engraved into the surface. A cast or impression of such a stone is therefore in relief. The other type is called cameo, this again is a precious or semi-precious stone where the picture is carved in relief, on top of the surface. A type of stone, which has the appropriate characteristics to make a cameo from, is sardonyx. The different coloured layers within this stone produce a particularly good contrast which brings out the picture. It is confusing that both intaglios and cameos are called gems, although in most cases the word gem is used for intaglio as the opposite of a cameo. Historically intaglios also had a practical use as seals, whereas cameos were not suited for this purpose.

The tradition of gem collecting reached its peak in the 18th-century. In line with Neo-classical ideals gem collecting was a popular topic of conversation. Gem collectors were faced with a problem: collections were not always accessible for study and the number of original gems for sale on the market was limited. Impressions in glass-paste, lacquer, plaster (gesso), sulphur and wax offered an alternative. Large collections that were made up of such impressions were set up, as well by those with an archaeological interest as by dilettantes who took up gem collecting as a hobby. Pierre Jean Mariette, who is considered the greatest gem-expert in 18th-century France, states in his book entitled Traité (1750) that twenty-one large collections existed in Italy, four in France and fourteen in England, Germany and Holland, plus the remark that their number was growing.

Those who involved themselves with the new sciences of archaeology and ancient philology were faced with a dilemma. On the one hand the writings of antiquity praised Greek architecture and sculpture of the 4th-century B.C. as the pinnacle of art, but these works of art survived only as scattered fragments and as Roman copies. Gems on the other hand that were made of valuable and imperishable material had survived time as no other work of art did. This is one of the reasons that explain the renewed interest in gems during this period, for it was an appropriate means to gain insight in the art of the ancient Greeks.

Baron Philipp von Stosch (1691-1757) was a renowned collector and founder of gem-research. In 1724 he published an extensive catalogue that was a major contribution to the study of ancient gems. Stosch owned the largest gem collection ever, in later literature it is

651. For a general outline of the history of collecting gem-impressions, see: Godin 1995.
652. For several aspects of the history of gems and gem-collecting see: Willers & Raselli-Nydegger 2003.
653. Goethes Werke (Sophien-Ausgabe) 1900, Abt.1, Band 49, 2.
654. For more information on 17th- and 18th-century studio’s where gems were manufactured see: Meyer 1973.
655. Mariette 1750, passim.
656. Philipp von Stosch, Gemmae Antiquae Caelatae, Amsterdam 1724. This catalogue described seventy gems with signatures of ancient masters. The stones were chosen from what was available at
estimated that his collection of impressions in sulphur and different kind of glass paste, covering several periods, ran up to twenty-eight thousand pieces. After his death the impressions were sold to the Scotsman James Tassie (1735-1799), a wax portraitist who had worked for Wedgwood. He made impressions of gems and cameos in coloured pastes, white enamel and sulphur for commercial purposes. His nephew William continued to sell them in the 19th-century. Another great English stone engraver was Nathaniel Marchant (1739-1816); he also made and sold impressions of gems.

The study of ancient gems took on a new direction when impressions became more widely available. The technique of copying gems and seals was not new. Impressions in glass paste and clay were already known in the ancient Orient, Egypt, as well as the Greek, Etruscan and Roman period. Before assembled series of gem impressions became more widely available during the 18th-century, one was dependent on large gem-books illustrated with copper engravings. A limiting factor was that these books they were not very reliable, for the depicted scenes on the gems were transformed into the style of their time, enlarged or refined or even completely new compositions were created (ill.29, 30a+b).

Philippp Daniel Lippert (1702-1785) perfected the process of making good modern impressions. He improved the technique by producing sharp, imperishable impressions in kaolin that has the same hardness as porcelain. It was Lippert’s aim to set up the largest dactyliothec of impressions in the world. He also reintroduced the old name dactyliothec for a gem collection (ill.31). Winckelmann who sent him many impressions of gems during his stay in Italy assisted him with this project. Lippert’s first collection of 1755 contained three thousand impressions. There was much discussion among those with an archaeological interest to determine what were genuine antique originals or not, since most collections contained both antique gems as imitations or forgeries by modern masters. The problem was that Lippert only had a limited knowledge of the originals. He was aware of this and therefore assembled a new reduced collection with impressions in 1776 taken from what he believed to be genuine antique gems. All the pieces were numbered, described and divided in two categories: mythological and historical subjects.

the time in gem collections throughout Europe. Its aim was to offer a review of genuine antique gems, since there were many copies or downright forgeries by modern master-stonecutters in circulation. See: Heringa 1976, 76; Zazoff 1983, 3ff.

657. Zazoff 1983, 23; Stosch also worked also as a spy for the British government. To fulfill his overwhelming passion to collect gems he even thought nothing of stealing from collections he was invited to visit as one of the foremost experts of his day. For elaboration, see: Lewis 1961.


659. In England Marchant sold a dactyliothec of his own works. The printed catalogue was published in London in 1792 under the title: A Catalogue of One Hundred Impressions from Gems, engraved by Nathaniel Marchant.

660. The shortcomings of the engravings and drawings of gems were already mentioned at the time by Klotz (1769) and Gurlitt (1798), see: Heres 1971, 62.

661. There also existed impressions in other materials, but these were often unsharp, or did nor preserve well. E.g. impressions made from lacquer would often crack, wax was very sensitive to warm temperatures. Also see: Zazoff 1983, 152ff.

662. For instance: Winckelmann, Briefe II (ed. 1954) 298: in this letter d. 18 March 1763 Winckelmann mentions that he bought three-thousand gem impressions from Christian Dehn in Rome, but that among them there were many modern pieces, see: Heres 1971, 64. It is interesting in this context that Stosch himself was accused of encouraging the practise of forging ancient signatures on modern gems, see: Zazoff 1983, 187, Anm. 196.

663. Zazoff 1983, 160.Peter Zazoff remarks that Lippert never became an expert because there were still modern contemporary pieces in this collection.
Gem collecting was also particularly popular among Grand Tour travellers. They were brought back home as a souvenir, often displayed in elaborately decorated cabinets (ill.32a+b). It became an increasingly popular pastime for dilettantes to collect impressions and glass paste replicas of gems. They were relatively cheap, easy to carry along and had the air of antique art objects. Besides they also were useful as seals, mounted in rings or as an accessory on a watch chain. But usually these impressions were arranged in boxes, often shaped like books (ill.33, 34), although they were also sold separately. Johann Wolfgang Goethe is known to have been a passionate collector, during his visit to Rome in 1787 he wrote in his diary:

‘I have purchased a collection of two hundred of the best antique gem impressions. It is the finest that one has of old craftsmanship and this is also partly the reason why they have been selected. One cannot carry off anything more precious from Rome, especially because the impressions are so incredibly beautiful and crisp’.664

In Rome, German travellers on the Grand Tour and dilettanti were able to attend evening classes conducted by Hofrat Reiffenstein in order to learn how to make replicas of gems and cameos for themselves.665 The habit of tourists to take home impressions of carved stones as a token of remembrance of Rome lasted well into the end of the 19th-century. The impressions were usually made of plaster and sold in elegant decorative boxes with assembled series, arranged according to subject, like mythological scenes, Uomini illustri or famous buildings. Some of such boxes or display cases were intended to be hung on the wall as an object of interior decoration. (ill.35+36) Among the impressions were new creations as well as copies from antique stones. Such souvenirs could be obtained from several dealers, like, Antonio Amastini or Francesco Carnesecchi at the Via Condotti, Christian Dehn at the Via Babuino,666 (ill.37), Pietro Paololetti at the Via Croce, or Tomasso Cades at the Via del Corso.667 The latter created the last important dactyliothec with plaster impressions in the early 1830s under the supervision of F.W.E. Gerhard, who was the founder of the German Archaeological Institute in Rome.

Gem impressions also played a role in the education system. In 1781 Anton Klausing, who was a professor of Antiquity and Philosophy in Leipzig, assembled a series of impressions with mythological subjects intended to be used in the school curriculum.668 In 1788 three German schools in Saksen were presented a dactyliothec assembled by Lippert for didactic purposes. Or as Christian Klotz (1786) formulated it:

‘Which will be helpful to open the hearts of our youths to the delicate impression of beauty’.669

666. Dehn was a servant of Baron van Stosch, he opened his workshop that manufactured gem impressions at the Via Babuino around 1740, see: Zazofff 1983, 55. For elaboration see: Kockel & Graepler 2006, passim.
667. For elaboration see: Godin 1995, n.35.
668. The title of this series was: Versuch einer mythologischen Dactyliotheca für Schulen, see: Zazoff 1983, 169.
Lippert also had the hope and aspiration that artists would benefit from his dactyliothec. 670

Ernst Heinrich Toelken, who was the director of the Antquarium in Berlin, was the first to cast doubt on the Antiquity of existing collections with gems. In 1832 he was shown the Daktyliothek Poniatowski, a set of 419 impressions that were presented by Prince Stanislas Poniatowski to the King of Prussia. 671 His suspicion was not aroused by the quality or style of the engraving, but by the signatures of the engravers known to us from the Greek and Roman world. (ill.38) How, he argued, can engravers working hundreds of years apart produce intaglios of the same style. ‘Thus (..) we have here, and I am extremely sorry to give this hard judgement, in works and words a scientific deceit of such dimensions never seen in art history before’. 672 We now know that Poniatowski (1754-1833) commissioned about 2500 gems and encouraged the belief that they were, in fact, ancient originals. The greater part however, was the product of a group of gem-engravers in Rome who turned to Classical literature, especially the works of Homer, Virgil and Ovid for inspiration. Thus they were in fact Neo-Classical interpretations of Classical mythology, as known from literature, not art! All this said one has to realise though that identification of gemstones is very complex, even for present day experts. 673

In the evolution process of copies of the antique the gemstones, especially the casted replica’s, played an essential role. Their popularity can hardly be overestimated, just like their contribution in spreading the knowledge of classical antiquity.

* * *

and a university professor in Göttingen (1762) and Halle (1765). His book promoted various practical uses of Lippert’s dactyliothec, especially among the middle classes in Germany.

670. Lippert 1767, as quoted by Heres 1971, 70.
671. The gems were later recognised as ‘modern’, and were unjustly spurned and sold cheaply. The majority was acquired by John Tyrrell, but some were purchased by others. All have been widely dispersed ever since. Most of the whereabouts of the gems is unknown but there are more than 600 of the Tyrrell gems in the Beazley Archive in Oxford. For elaboration see: claudia.wagner@ashmus.ox.ac.uk
672. www.evaonline.org/gems/poniatowski