

EARLY MODERN MERCHANTS AS COLLECTORS

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PUBLICATION ABSTRACTS

THE EARLY MODERN MERCHANT AS A COLLECTOR: AN INTRODUCTION

CHRISTINA M. ANDERSON (University of Oxford)

Self-Fashioning: How European Merchants Perceived and Presented Themselves and Their Collections

This chapter demonstrates that merchants of the early modern period saw themselves as important members of society who contributed to the public good through their economic and social activities. It takes an in-depth look at two texts in order to express this. The first, Benedetto Cotrugli's *Of Commerce and the Perfect Merchant (Della mercatura et del mercante perfetto)* of 1458 describes the 'mercante glorioso' or 'glorious merchant' who, through his domestic setting and his collection, sets an example of upholding precious public values. The second, Caspar Barlaeus's *Wise Merchant (Mercator Sapiens)* of 1632 speaks about the necessity of the merchants of Amsterdam to combine their talent for buying and selling commodities with wisdom and an appreciation for learning and art. After these texts, the powerful evidence of images (a series of portraits of merchants with their collections) provides proof of the neglected importance of merchant collectors in the period 1450-1650.

STEPHEN JOHNSTON (Museum of the History of Science, University of Oxford)

Following Objects Around: Circulation, Collecting and the Merchant

Much of the recent history of collecting has been European in focus, and many of its primary sources are inventories. Their snapshot view captures a collection at a particular moment in time – crucially important as evidence but nevertheless limiting, because no collection was a static assemblage. If most collections were in a process of perpetual change, we need to consider the variety of ways in which objects moved. This means following their acquisition, disposal and circulation – their material modes of movement. By seeing collecting as part of a larger history of the circulation of objects we can more readily engage with non-European contexts in which, rather than collecting, the central narratives of material culture have revolved around exchange, value and the meanings of ownership. As a motto, 'following objects around' serves as a challenge to historical practice. Finding what things were juxtaposed in a Renaissance cabinet, and the routes by which they came to be there, typically challenges our modern disciplinary boundaries. The history of art and the history of science do not adequately capture the texture of 'nature and art' as embodied in early collections, and both have too often been separated from economic history. Merchant collectors provide us with a way to diversify and enrich our understanding of collecting, and its wider significance as a social practice.

ELIZABETH LAMBOURN (De Montfort University, Leicester)

Merchants and Collecting in the Islamic World

This chapter presents a brief introduction to practices of collecting amongst mercantile groups in the Islamic world, and the problems associated with integrating these into broader, global, discussions of collecting in the early modern period. The Islamic world presents distinctive and substantially different patterns of collecting to contemporary Western Europe and China, particularly outside court circles. These differences have traditionally constituted an obstacle to the integration of the Islamic world into discussions of global collecting but they also provide an illuminating counterpoint and challenge to often Eurocentric assumptions. The chapter considers, nevertheless, those areas where, in spite of these very

different patterns, common practices emerge. Collecting provided European merchants with a forum in which to demonstrate their adoption of elite taste and values, to participate in networks of acquisition and appreciation, and ultimately to gain social status and wealth. In the Islamic world, while merchants did not generally seek to emulate elite practices until they themselves joined court circles, their role as middlemen in the procurement or manufacture of valuable things gave them access to substantially the same circles and ultimately to improved social status and financial gain.

PROVENANCE AND ACQUIRED PRESTIGE

SUSAN NALEZYTY (Independent)

Considered Judgement and Prestigious Provenance: Bartolomeo della Nave's Acquisitions from the Collection of Pietro Bembo

After Cardinal Pietro Bembo's death the parties interested in his famed museum were numerous. Bembo's grandson found a local buyer in Bartolomeo della Nave, a Venetian merchant with an ample budget and obsessive preoccupation for acquiring art. Noting this purchase in 1615, Vincenzo Scamozzi suggested pride of place for the sculptures, but also pointed to the cyclical nature of collecting, which encompasses both accumulation and deaccession. Prize works from della Nave's gallery originated from this patrician's collection, and later, after the merchant's death, many of his objects seeded the rich gallery of paintings and sculpture amassed by James, Third Marquis and later Duke Hamilton. Using cross-referenced material that I have gathered on Bembo's collection, I hope to shed light more specifically on the origins of della Nave's gallery, by presenting individual works extant in museums or evidence on lost works that were exhibited here. Scamozzi suggests that della Nave brilliantly treated the problems particular to the display of three-dimensional works, implying that they provided the ordering principle for ambulating pathways to enable scholarly examination. This question of display provides a point of departure to consider the ways in which spaces for viewing may have determined the process of filtration for acquisition.

AMY HWANG (Princeton University)

Imperial Treasures in the Hands of a Ming Merchant: Xiang Yuanbian's Collection

The wealthy Ming-era merchant Xiang Yuanbian (1525-1590) is known for his unparalleled private collection of painting and calligraphy, many pieces of which are considered masterpieces and are still extant. Unlike most famous art collectors in Chinese history, Xiang Yuanbian was a member of neither the imperial household nor the literati class, the usual background of an art collector in imperial China. A "mere merchant," Xiang not only amassed painting and calligraphy in the thousands of pieces, he also managed to possess objects that were once unobtainable — objects from imperial collections. Through the lens of former court objects in Xiang Yuanbian's collection, I will discuss his methods of acquisition and the circumstances under which imperial collections were disseminated into private hands. I will also address the ideological operations embedded in the collecting activities of the imperial households and of commoners like Xiang Yuanbian, as well as the various values these objects embodied.

ANNE-LISE TROPATO (University of Rome II 'Tor Vergata')

Gaspard de Monconys (1592-1664): Provost-Marshal of the Merchants of Lyon and a Forgotten Collector

As King Louis the XIIIth's leading official in Lyon, Gaspard de Monconys enjoyed jurisdiction over the river trade of one of the most important European hubs, through which also passed the most precious works of art going from Rome to Paris. For more than fifty years, de Monconys worked on building and augmenting his marvellous collection, further enriched after 1645 thanks to the rarities brought by his 6

brother Balthazar, a famous explorer of the occidental and oriental worlds. Gaspard de Monconys published engravings of forty of the most beautiful pieces of his collection (having been inspired by his friends Gabriel Naudé and Cassiano Dal Pozzo). He also made his knowledge and his collection available to the French scholar François Duchesne, historiographer of the king, hence collaborating on the major humanistic project that Richelieu had entrusted to him several years before: the editing of the *History* of all the great French cardinals. Unfortunately, the collection was broken up less than ten years after his death, condemning Gaspard de Monconys to a four-hundred-year-long oblivion as a collector. This paper aims to rescue de Monconys from oblivion and demonstrate his essential contribution to the development of a scientific approach to the study of history and art.

NETWORKS, EXCHANGE AND DIASPORA

HEATHER DALTON (Honorary Fellow, University of Melbourne)

Portraits, pearls and things 'wch are very straunge to owres': The Thorne/Withypoll trading syndicate in the early 16th century Iberian Atlantic

By the second decade of the sixteenth century, the merchants in the Thorne/Withypoll syndicate were investing in voyages of discovery as well as trading in the Atlantic in partnership with Spanish and Genoese merchants. In doing so, these Englishmen accumulated knowledge, books, maps, navigational equipment and rare items from the New World - as well as the property, slaves, artworks and precious objects associated with their burgeoning wealth. While the collections of the Withypoll family remained in private hands, the Thornes donated theirs to the school and library they established in Bristol. Their associate, Roger Barlow, who had traded in North Africa and explored the Rio de la Plata in South America, housed his collection of books, instruments, and items from Africa and the New World in his library in the dissolved commandery of the Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem at Slebech in Pembrokeshire, which he acquired after the dissolution of the monasteries. It is my contention that the urge of those in this close trading circle to demonstrate familial influence, cosmopolitanism, wealth and knowledge led them to collect and display items that were remarkable in their rarity. Many of the items, especially those linked to navigation, were as useful as they were rare, and it is my belief that they played an active role in knowledge transfer into the seventeenth century.

AMY LANDAU (Walters Art Museum, Baltimore)

Armenian Merchant Patronage in New Julfa and Beyond: The Case of Petros and Polos Velijanian

One of the most expansive merchant networks of the early modern period was that of the Armenians. Dispersed across vast geographic areas, the “stateless” Armenian merchants played a pivotal role in the circulation of goods and information across ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic boundaries. For a century, the central node of the Armenian trade diaspora was New Julfa, located in Safavid Persia. At the center of their global network, in New Julfa, Armenian merchants commissioned churches, monasteries, schools and a printing press, as well as collected works of art from around the world, especially European paintings and prints. Their patronage and collecting habits had a significant impact on the visual culture of early modern Iran. This paper focuses on the patronage and collections of one of the wealthiest merchant families of New Julfa, the Velijanians. It brings to the fore the artists working in an “Europeanised” mode the family commissioned and the most important architectural projects of the suburb of New Julfa they underwrote. This paper positions Armenian merchant collections and patronage in the larger context of the role of merchant patronage in the formulation and diffusion of global modes in the visual culture of the early modern period.

DAVID HOWARTH (University of Edinburgh (retired))

'Gilding The Moon': The East India Company and Material Culture Exchange between England, Persia and India, in early Stuart England

The title of this paper evokes the romance of sea-bound trade between the East India Company and lands east of Aleppo during the early seventeenth century. The phrase 'Gilding *The Moon*' derives from a payment of one hundred pounds to Rowland Buckett, one of the leading lights of the Painter-Stainers' Company, for painting and gilding the East India Company merchantman, *The Moon*, in February 1618. The purpose of this paper is to indicate the size and variety of commodity exchange which developed between England and eastern states during the first half of the seventeenth century. I aim to convey the variety of fine art, decorative and luxury goods commissioned, collected and exchanged by English merchants: tapestries; carpets; 'books' (manuscripts) in Arabic and Persian; crystal cabinets; damascened armour; hunting spaniels; swords; paintings/miniatures; jewels; elephant's teeth and coral; exotic live fauna. My paper will establish a ground plot for a more substantial structure about what precisely these dealings consisted of; and more ambitiously, how the import and collecting of commodities may have affected the growth of the decorative arts in early modern England.

BARBARA KARL (Museum für angewandte Kunst (MAK), Vienna)

Gardening in Goa – Filippo Sassetti's experiences with Indian medicine and plants

Between 1584 and 1588 the Florentine merchant and humanist Filippo Sassetti sent a whole sequence of letters providing valuable insight into contemporary Indian or rather Malabari cultural and economic life from India to his Tuscan friends and the grand ducal court in Florence. Apart from the published letters, scholarship has so far focused on linguistic, geographic, medical and ethnographical issues related to his letters. This presentation focuses on another aspect: his attempts to collect and grow plants and medicine in India, not only for himself but also for colleagues and the Medici grand dukes in Florence. The letters written by Filippo Sassetti illustrate how closely connected the collection of a Florentine residing in India with the Tuscan intelligentsia actually was. The letters are exceptional as they allow us to follow the development of his knowledge on local goods, medicine and plants.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIABILITY

TARNYA COOPER (National Portrait Gallery, London)

English Merchants in the Sixteenth and early seventeenth Century: Commissioning and Collecting Portraits and Decorative Objects

In comparison with continental Europe, the art market in England was at an embryonic stage in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and consequently the collections of wealthy merchants were smaller in scale and ambition. They have also been very little studied. This paper will centre principally on portrait painting, but also touch on the more widespread ownership of silver and gilt ware and other non-functional decorative objects. Several financiers, merchants and elite artisans left inventories recording collections of paintings and other 'pictures' including the goldsmiths Robert Amadas (d.1533) and Martin Bowes (1496-1566) and the merchant Sir Ralph Warren (d.1554). The paper will also look at the potential influence of foreign merchants living in England such as Jacob Cool (1563-1628); a Netherlandish silk merchant and member of the Dutch Church in London, who owned a significant collection of engravings, antiquities, statues, marbles and coins. However, this talk will also question what defines a group of objects as a collection and what range, or scale of objects might be considered as 'collected'.

LOUISE CORT (Freer and Sackler Galleries, Washington D.C.)

Tea and Commerce: Japanese Merchants in Kyoto and Sakai

The form of the Japanese tea ceremony known as *wabicha* is said to have reached the peak of its aesthetic development in the late sixteenth century under the guidance of the tea master Sen no Rikyu (1522–1591) and is usually characterized as austere and spiritual. Discussion of tea and its significance within Japanese culture typically focuses on the repertory of tea utensils that was perfected under Rikyu's aegis and on appreciation and analysis of surviving heirloom pieces. Less commonly discussed is the significance of the merchant-class background of Rikyu and the other "men of tea" who contributed to the development of *wabicha* as an aesthetic pursuit during the sixteenth century. Social status and wealth derived from civic and commercial activities underwrote their engagement with tea. International trade connections gave them access to exotic objects that could be reinvented as utensils for the presentation of tea. This paper argues that the development of the genre of *wabicha* was inseparable from the training and temperament of the merchants who were its major proponents. The essence of *wabicha* had been shaped by the activities of merchants who had unparalleled access to marvelous objects and "eyes" to see them, and who dared to deploy them in boldly experimental ways.

HENK LOOIJESTEIJN (Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam)

For the Love of God? A Dutch Mennonite Merchant as Book Collector

The little-known but very rich Dutch cloth merchant Boudewijn van der Vecht († 1667) played, during three decades, an important if sometimes controversial role within the Mennonite congregation of Middelburg. Active as a cloth merchant in what was in his lifetime still the Dutch Republic's second largest trade emporium, Van der Vecht left a large amount of money to his nephews and nieces at the time of his death. His probate inventory shows Van der Vecht's townhouse was decorated with paintings, and it contains a detailed list of many of the books Van der Vecht possessed in his lifetime. In my paper I intend to focus on Van der Vecht's library, which contained a great number of works by theologians covering most of the contemporary religious spectrum. On the face of things, Van der Vecht seems to have had a wide interest in theology, and in the theological debates raging in and before his day. However, I believe there is more to this collection of books than meets the eye. In my paper I will contend that Van der Vecht's library was not just a private library catering to the theological interests of one individual, but that it was a public – or rather semi-public – space, serving as a 'reference library' of Middelburg's Mennonite 'servants of the word', the preachers.

ALEKSANDRA LIPÍŃSKA (Instytut Historii Sztuki, Wrocław, Poland)

Brothers in Collecting: Thomas and Jacob Rhdiger – Two 16th Century Silesian Art Collectors and Bibliophiles

Although seemingly distant from cultural centers where models for collecting were shaped, Wrocław, the capital of Silesia in the early modern era within the Habsburg ruled Kingdom of Bohemia, enjoyed a period of cultural prominence and witnessed the emergence of its earliest collections. The largest contribution to this phenomenon came from the wealthy burgher class and specifically from a second generation of merchant sons, who benefited from their fathers' rapid enrichment, resulting from the economic boom of the early 16th century. To the exclusive patrician circle that dominated the city's political and cultural life in the second half of the century belonged also the Rhdiger family. The founder of the clan, Nicolas I, settled in Wrocław just before 1512 and was a common merchant with a rather vague background. However, within the next four decades of his life, thanks no doubt to his talents and strategic alliances, he managed to become a member of the local financial and political establishment. Notwithstanding family wealth and a noble title (acquired in 1544), representatives of the second Rhdiger generation were forced to develop strategies aimed at establishing equal status with the old city

elite. In my paper I shall present Thomas and Jacob Rehdiger's connections with intellectuals, artists and collectors, connections built upon their travels in Europe and by means of correspondence. Moreover, I shall investigate their interactions with the local elite, the place of their collections in the cultural landscape of Silesia as well as their contribution to the formation of the first Wrocław public libraries and proto-museums.

THE ART DEALER AS COLLECTOR

BARBARA FURLOTTI (Warburg Institute)

Between Collection and Stock: The Ambiguous Role of Merchants as Collectors of Antiquities in Sixteenth-Century Rome

In his 'Delle statue antiche' (Venice, 1558), the Bolognese naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi provided a valuable survey of the antique sculptures that could be admired in the Papal city at the time. The book takes into consideration semi-public places, starting from the Belvedere courtyard and garden, to private dwellings, including cardinals' palaces and aristocratic residences, and artisans' and merchants' houses and shops. The presence of the latter category is usually considered as proof that collecting antiquities was a widespread practice at every level of the Roman society, even among people of limited income and education. In fact, a careful contextualisation reveals that artisans and merchants played an ambiguous role in this respect, balancing their activities between collecting interests and economic speculations. Aldrovandi, for instance, cites the collection of one "messer Vincenzo Stampa". From other sources, we know that Vincenzo worked in his family's tailor workshop together with his father and brother. Functioning as a collateral business, the Stampa family had also started accumulating antiquities with the precise aim of reselling them. This and other examples raise both methodological and theoretical problems. How should we interpret references to the presence of antiquities in merchants' and artisans' houses and shops in sixteenth-century Rome? For a merchant involved in the art market, what was the difference, both from a symbolic and an economic point of view, between a collection of antiquities and a stock of ancient sculptures intended to be sold? My paper aims at exploring these questions.

TARYN ZARILLO (Columbia University)

Complementary Activities: Boschini, del Sera and Renieri as Merchants, Collectors and Painters in Seicento Venice

Seventeenth-century Venice saw the emergence of a new type of art dealer: the *sensale*, or middleman, who knew about customs duties, packing, valuation, inventories and shipping. These men typically catered to the desires of highly-placed foreign officials acting on behalf of their own political patrons, and Marco Boschini, Paolo del Sera and Niccolo Renieri formed the core of this particular type of business arrangement in mid-Seicento Venice. The difference, however, between other art dealers and Boschini, del Sera, and Renieri was that these three maintained their own private collections while simultaneously dealing in paintings as their primary income. They were trained as painters and operated within the artistic community of Venice, locating pictures and commissions for their friends; commissions which ran the gamut from portraits to forgeries. On occasion they sold off portions (and in some instances all) of their individual personal collections for profit. The motivations—beyond pure financial incentives—that drove these merchants of paintings also to collect them, and the underlying ideological perspective regarding the visual legacy of the Cinquecento masters, are contextualized in this paper within the framework of Venetian society.

CHRISTINA M. ANDERSON (University of Oxford)

Flemish Dealing in Venice: The Cases of Daniel Nijs (1572-1647) and Karel Helman (d. 1605)

Through the examples of Daniel Nijs and Karel Helman, Flemish merchants in Venice, this chapter addresses the question of whether an art dealer viewed his entire collection as stock, or whether he differentiated between those pieces he would sell and those he kept permanently for himself. This chapter will show that the answer is not clear-cut, but that it is nevertheless worth considering because it provides us with information about how merchants thought about the value of particular objects. The documents surviving from Nijs's attempts to satisfy his creditors after his bankruptcy in 1631 show that he applied monetary values to his paintings in the same way that he priced fabric, pigments, jewels and the other commodities in which he dealt. He did, however, possess one item that he valued highly both monetarily and aesthetically, his collector's cabinet. Comparing the fate of his cabinet with his paintings and statues suggests that while he did appear to consider one part of his collection as more precious, in the end, his financial situation forced him to part with all the works of art he owned. Although Nijs both traded in and collected gems, Helman appears, from his inventory, to have kept his collecting activities quite separate from his business as a jeweller-merchant. There were numerous paintings by artists such as Titian, Veronese and others, as well as Turkish and Indian objects that he must have collected during his time in the East listed in the inventory. The only gems in the house, however, were those kept in a secure cabinet where the family documents were also housed securely, suggesting that for Helman, unlike Nijs, gems were strictly for business purposes and not something to be collected.