

Antiquity in Weimar

Review of:

Martin Dönike, *Altertumskundliches Wissen in Weimar. Transformationen der Antike*, Bd 25. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2013. vi, 515 p., \$112.00, ISBN 9783110313826

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Altertumskundliches Wissen in Weimar contains various sections which focus on antiquity during the period 1770-1830. The book opens with descriptions and analyses of a number of publications dedicated to the study of Greco-Roman antiquity, read and discussed in Weimar in the early nineteenth century until Goethe's death in 1832. The editor – who worked extensively on the topic of classical scholarship in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Germany – outlines in his introduction how he came to produce this book. He argues that Weimar was a cradle of research and teaching in the late eighteenth century thanks to the presence of an interested Maecenas, Duke Carl August, who stimulated Goethe, Schiller and Herder. Initially, these scholars and poets were influenced by the works of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1707-1768), which were re-edited in Weimar by Carl Ludwig Fernow who worked on them until his death in 1808, and were then completed between 1808 and 1825 by Johannes Schulze. The comments and additions penned in the volumes of this edition, as well as other comments, reflect how widely read these academics were in classical scholarship when they made their annotations. The most important issue for Winckelmann was the source of constituted philhellenism, which was deemed comparable with Rousseau's notion of the ideal world. In the view of the Weimar scholars, Greece had a perpetual value, for both past and present. This must be a notion rather than an opinion based on actual evidence, since none of them – like Winckelmann himself – ever set foot on Greek land. Yet, there were many criticisms to be made of Winckelmann's works as well, and many scholars noted mistakes and flaws in the almost classical books that resulted in them being less sacrosanct than the first admirers had believed. That is why, in a positive way, Winckelmann could serve as the foundation of further research into the nineteenth century. Even Goethe saw Winckelmann's oeuvre as the result of eighteenth-century thinking and researching, and found it relevant in itself, 'in ihrem menschlich-bildenden Wert'.¹ At the same time, the production of antiquarian publications had considerably increased towards 1800 and this caused a paradigm shift: antiquity was no longer a utopian goal, but served as a tangible source for modern society thanks to its educational

¹This can be translated as: 'thanks to its own human edifying value'. Martin Dönike, *Altertumskundliches Wissen in Weimar. Transformationen der Antike*, Bd 25. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2013, 6.

and scientific values. For all these reasons, the learned circles of the tiny German state Weimar can be considered as a pars pro toto for the development of Altertumswissenschaft in the many states of Germany in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

The books which played a fundamental role in the study of antiquity in Weimar are presented in part II, 'Katalog' (pp. 41-257). Each book is briefly described and its author, or authors, introduced. If possible, a connection is sought with Goethe and his friends in Weimar, who may have written reviews, used them in their own works or had met the authors in question. Goethe's own 'reception' of these works is singled out in detail, which is possible thanks to the exhaustive documentation of his daily activities, the contents of his library and even the records of the loans he made from the local Anna Amalia library. The thirty-six unnumbered items (sometimes comprising of more than one book) are ordered alphabetically according to the family name of the author rather than according to subject or in chronological order. The choice of these works is not explained, which means that the reader is unable to understand how representative this selection is. In some cases, similar works are enumerated in the commentaries, but we also encounter various works on the same topic as single items of their own. If one tries to reassemble the works on the basis of their topic, leaving out the alphabetical order, this proves to be difficult, since the possible categories – apart from topography - are not easy to establish, and various works cover more themes. Below is listed a suggestion of a possible articulation:

- 1) General: Annali and Bullettino of the Instituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica (both periodicals), Dorow (Roman and German tombs), Welcker
- 2) Art History: Rochette, Seroux d'Agincourt, Thiersch
- 3) Herculaneum and Pompeii: Antichità di Ercolano; Gell/Gandy, Goró von Agyagfalva, Ternite, Zahn
- 4) Egypt: Denon
- 5) Greece: Brondsted, Dodwell
- 6) Rome: Burgess
- 7) Sculpture: Elgin Marbles, Hittorf/Zanth, Quatremère de Quincy, *Über die ... Basreliefs*, Wagner/Schelling, Zoëga
- 8) Vases: Millin, Millingen, Tischbein
- 9) Coins: Mionnet
- 10) Collections: Becker (Dresden, sculptures), Bolzenthall (Berlin, gems), Combe and others (London, terracotta sculptures), Musée français, Worsley/Visconti
- 11) Myth, Iconography: Creuzer, Hirt, Laborde (Spain, mosaics), Levezow, Schelling, Visconti/Mongez

The second part of the book consists of the first publication of Carl Ludwig Fernow's academic lecture series *Von den vorzüglichsten aus dem Alterthume übriggebliebenen Statuen* held during the one year that he was a professor of

Philosophy in Jena.² After that he would become librarian of the Anna Amalia library in Weimar. Fernow's definition of archaeology is not far from Winckelmann's conception of this very new branch of research as the study of products created by man, the majority of which are artistic works. In the bulk of the text, only sculpture and some minor arts like glyptic and numismatic are analysed. Fernow argues that the study of antiquity can either be carried out on the basis of actual examination or working with publications (preferably those containing illustrations). Clearly, Fernow stresses the importance of physical examination, and he could personally rely on his own knowledge of Italian collections of antiquities. The discussion of these works of art is subdivided into classes based on iconography, starting with two single lectures on the Apollo Belvedere and the Laocoon and Torso Belvedere as principles of art, followed by male gods, heroes and ideal figures, and goddesses and women status. In the last chapter (12), portraits, images of animals, and sculpted adornments – like candelabra – are briefly discussed. Architecture and ceramics are missing from this text, which might be explained by the fact that the course only covered one semester, and Fernow envisaged a second part during a second semester. The order of the chapters/lectures does not differ very much from the old taxonomic systems used by the antiquarians from the seventeenth century onwards, the same antiquarians so despised by Fernow and his great master Winckelmann. Fernow was not sure of his pedagogic capacities, since he explains at the beginning that he was going to read aloud his written text and begged pardon for the fact that he could not consult his books, which had not yet arrived from Italy. It is no wonder that Fernow sticks to Winckelmann's principle of aesthetics as the leading rule for his analysis of art works. These works are the objects of collections, the inspiration of artists, and they incite scholars to investigate them in order to understand ancient culture.

In the first lecture he dwells on style as the expression of the match between content and form. It also illustrates the cultural environment in which an object was made, i.e. Egyptian, Etruscan, archaic Greek, and classical Greek culture. The latter era is further articulated on the basis of Winckelmann's paradigm. In the discussion of single works, he often starts with Winckelmann and gives later opinions and adjustments like those of Lessing, Goethe and others. His own opinion shows a meditation on the various alternatives and in no way a zealous maintenance of Winckelmann's ideas. However, for most modern readers, the differences between Winckelmann and his followers are very subtle, covered by a thicket of aesthetics and words of admiration. I would have liked a more detailed analysis by Dönike to make the reader aware of the differences.

We may ask how these lessons were given, in an audience of some hundred students, without visual aids. Fernow is not particularly positive as to the value of gypsum casts, since they are often copies from copies of copies and have muddled surfaces.

Dönike gives some very modest notes on the diplomatically reproduced text, but refrains from references to publications that Fernow might have used, apart

²Read in the years 1803-1804; see 259-451. Page 452 shows facsimile of two pages from the manuscript.

from Winckelmann's works. In that sense, there is no connection at all between the two main components of the monograph, which in my view is regrettable.

Finally, there are appendices with correspondence regarding the publication of Winckelmann's work in Weimar, and with a timetable of the most important developments in classical scholarship between 1710 and 1845. The book concludes with an extensive bibliography and indices of names and ancient works of art discussed in the book.

To summarise, Dönike provides us with important material which may be the basis for an analysis of the study of what we would call the history of ancient, rather than classical art, in Weimar around 1800. The book has been carefully edited, but contains a few – inevitable – misprints in the descriptions of titles and in other parts of the texts. The illustrations show the title plates or selective reproductions from plates in the books discussed and no figures of the works analysed by Fernow.

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