

Under the Greek sky: New approaches to Winckelmann's reception and historiography

Introduction to a *Journal of Art Historiography* Special section

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The writings of the German classicist and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann are well known to have heralded a revolution in approaches to the history of ancient art and culture and contributed to the spread of neoclassical taste throughout enlightenment Europe. While Winckelmann's appreciation of ancient statuary is well known, however, his ideas and influence on the study, collection, display, and imitation of 'lesser' arts—coins, vases, costume, even casts—is less well understood. Throughout his works Winckelmann exalted ancient, especially Greek art for its visualisation of embodied beauty—his goal of art—while his concept of imitation infiltrated his appreciation of antiquities large and small. As he stated on the eve of his move to Rome 'The one way for us to become great, perhaps inimitable, is by imitating the ancients' (*Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, 1755). Through personal contacts, especially in Rome, Winckelmann inspired others to imitate both the spirit and forms of antiquity in their own artistic productions. Subsequently through his networks and with his writings, he influenced generations of scholars, aesthetes, collectors, craftsmen, and artists, both within and beyond Italy, in their developing tastes for authentic antiquities, adaptations, and copies, and in seeking to recreate the classical ideal for contemporary times. Winckelmann's concept of imitation thus became a linchpin for modern ideas about the diffusion, appropriation, and appreciation of art.

This collection of essays re-evaluates Winckelmann's contribution to art historiography through examination of some of his overlooked writings, and from a range of historical and artistic perspectives that include his impact on the history of collecting and his reception. Eckart Marchand investigates the conception, perception and status of plaster and plaster casts and their capacity to feel or sense beauty in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in relation to Winckelmann's development of taste. Fiona Gatty proposes that clothes played an important role in Winckelmann's historic purpose to prove the superiority of Greek art, and embodied the intangible qualities of the Greek ideal, such as grace and expression. Aris Sarafianos engages with Winckelmann's notion of the relationship between art and climate and the fierce disputes his environmental model of culture engendered in Britain. In the field of numismatics Andrew Burnett examines Winckelmann's impact on the history of collecting and the display of coins in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Finally, Amy Smith explores Winckelmann's pivotal role in the study of Greek vases that evolved in tandem with the emerging neoclassical taste for these archaeological finds; her investigation

considers his comments on the drawings—which he compared to those of Raphael—and inscriptions that he and others observed on them.

In putting together this varied selection of new approaches to the historiography of Winckelmann and his reception, we wrestled with the complex history of the translation and dissemination of his work. While some authors of articles in this special section have engaged with the original German version of Winckelmann's work, the insights of others respond to and address the influence of posthumous editions and/or translations of his work into English, French and Italian. Rather than seek to impose a uniformity of translation, therefore, the editors have left it to each author to determine which versions and translations of Winckelmann's writings they use for their article.

This selection of papers emerged from a series of workshops conducted at London (University College London and the Warburg Institute), University of Reading and Christ Church College, Oxford in 2017-2018 on the theme *Under the Greek Sky: Taste and the Reception of Classical art from Winckelmann to the present*, as part of the International Winckelmann Jubilees, under the auspices of the Winckelmann International Committee. We are grateful to all contributors to these workshops and especially our co-organisers for these workshops: Katherine Harloe, Hans-Christian Hönes, Daniel Orrells, Sadie Pickup and Lucy Russell. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the sponsors of the Oxford conference, the A.G. Leventis Foundation. These papers showcase the richness of different art historiographical approaches to Winckelmann and the ongoing significance and impact of his work for contemporary scholars.



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