

# Collecting and Museology



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Edited by

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Collecting and Museology

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Edited by Andrea M. Gáldy and Florian Dobmeier

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## ABBREVIATIONS

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <i>ad fam.</i> | <i>Epistulae ad familiares</i>               |
| bpk            | bpk Bildagentur Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte |
| cat.           | catalogue                                    |
| IAAP           | International Academy of Art, Palestine      |
| inv.           | inventory                                    |
| MoMA           | Museum of Modern Art, New York               |
| nr(s).         | number(s)                                    |
| n.             | note   |
| SGSM           | Staatliche Graphische Sammlung München       |
| V&A            | Victoria and Albert Museum                   |



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the editors of this volume, we would like to thank first of all the contributors to the seventh volume of collected essays for their articles and for their collaboration during the editing process. Several of these essays started as conference papers given at the *Collecting and Museology* conference held at the Strigel and Antoniter Museum in Memmingen, Germany in collaboration with Dr Axel Lapp and with the administrative support of MEWO Kunsthalle in October 2014.

Again, speakers and organisers benefited from the participation of the audience: thank you for your feedback and for attending our seminars and conferences. We also owe thanks to the session chairs: Prof emerita Dr Sheila ffolliott, Prof Dr Stefanie Gänger and Dr Joy Kearney. Thank you for volunteering your assistance and for a great job graciously done!

Our particular thanks go to Dr Robert B. Simon (New York) for his introduction to this volume. The editors are also very grateful to Kunstammer Georg Laue for yet again kindly providing the image for the dust jacket of a volume in the *Collecting Histories* series.

We also owe gratitude to IHR administrative staff who have supported our seminars and conferences in the most helpful manner from the onset.

Finally, we wish to thank Amanda Millar and Sophie Edminson at Cambridge Scholars Publishing for yet another beautiful volume.



## FOREWORD

‘[...] I want results and I want them quick! I’ll tell you how you can recognize my scarab when you get to the museum. That shameless old crook who sneaked it away from me has had the impudence to put it all by itself with a notice as big as a circus-poster alongside it saying that it is a Cheops of the Fourth Dynasty, presented’ – Mr. Peters choked – ‘presented by J. Preston Peters, Esq. That’s how you’re going to recognize it.’

[...] ‘The thing isn’t even in a glass case,’ continued Mr. Peters. ‘It’s lying on an open tray on top of a cabinet of Roman coins. Anybody who was left alone for two minutes in the place could take it. It’s criminal carelessness to leave a valuable scarab lying about like that. If he was going to steal my Cheops, he might at least have had the decency to treat it as if it was worth something.’

—P.G. Wodehouse, *Something Fresh* (1915), republished in *The World of Blandings* by Arrow Books: London, 2008, 131.

Lord Emsworth’s museum at Blandings is set up in a private part of the castle near the library. It is a favourite haunt of his lordship who likes to retire to this place to enjoy his treasures in peace and quiet. The museum is organised as an ensemble of glass cases and cabinets for the secure exhibition of his collecting objects. It is not a room to be accessed freely by members of the house party but guests need to be taken there on request and as a special honour. It is only on occasion that the latest addition to the exhibits is presented outside the usual display scheme as happens in the case of Mr. Peters’ coveted Cheops of the Fourth Dynasty, mistaken for a generous gift by Lord Emsworth, hence the card acknowledging the donation.

The quote above provides some useful keywords for this latest volume in the series *Collecting Histories*. It mentions modes of display, the sentimental attachment between collector and collection, the importance of connoisseurship and the ready acknowledgement of a donor’s contribution. The museum at Blandings is not quite a *kunst- and wunderkammer* nor is it yet a public museum. From what we can tell, the museum does not pursue an active policy of expansion or modernisation but it houses a great many treasures and can perhaps be best described as the apple of its owner’s eye.

To celebrate the first ten years of the international forum Collecting & Display as well as the launch of a dedicated series of publications – *Collecting Histories* – a conference dedicated to new directions in terms of collecting, display, visitor experience and the use of modern media in today's museums was held in the city of Memmingen in 2014. Its aim was to investigate whether and how the engagement with the history of collections in its diverse permutations has influenced and modified modern museology. With this publication, we intend to look forward towards a future, which offers exciting prospects as far as the diverse possibilities of display are concerned; not to forget the rising visitor numbers at many of the great museums worldwide.

What is the mission of collections and museums? And, how does one balance the history of collections and the collections themselves against the need for outreach activities, the call for edutainment and popular access in conjunction with a sustainable use of collecting items? Is there a way in which the past of a collection may point the way towards the best practice in the future use and presentation of the exhibits?

“Collecting” and “display” are the keywords that characterise the scholarly aims of the international forum founded by three scholars in 2004 ([www.collectinganddisplay.com](http://www.collectinganddisplay.com)). The group has run a series of research seminars at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London since 2005 and managed a chapter in Florence from 2008 to 2012. From 2006, Collecting & Display have organised summer conferences in London, Ottobeuren, Florence, Irsee, Memmingen and Jerusalem. The present publication is the seventh in the series of conference proceedings and it is our hope that there will be many more, dedicated to particular aspects of collecting and display.

Our first conference took place in July 2006 at the Institute of Historical Research and discussed the connection between collecting and dynastic ambition (CSP 2009). It was followed by the conference on collecting and the princely apartment (CSP 2011) and by one on female collectors (CSP 2012: *Women Patrons & Collectors*). The conference *Collecting East & West* (CSP 2013) examined the (often-times vicarious) encounters between different worlds via the objects imported from foreign cultures and displayed in settings that were intended to give at least a flavour of their original provenance. In 2013, Collecting & Display turned to collections of *naturalia* and *artificialia* (*Collecting Nature*, CSP 2014) in collaboration with Schwabenakademie Irsee. In 2014, two conferences took place: the first on collections of prints and drawings (*Collecting*



*Prints and Drawings*, CSP 2018) and the second which addressed the interesting effects of the study of historical collections on trends in museology published in this volume. In late 2016, a conference on collecting and provenance was held at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (CSP 2020), while in 2019 we discussed collections as “A Matter of Access” in Munich and London.

London and Memmingen,  
August 2019



# INTRODUCTION

ROBERT B. SIMON

Collecting and museology are intimately connected. They are not rigidly distinct fields; in fact their concerns manifestly overlap. What distinguishes each (for the most part) is that collecting derives from the efforts of one or more associated individuals, while museology is by definition an institutional practice. Moreover, collecting is primarily a private enterprise – subject to the tastes, interests and concerns of the collector or collectors – while museums tacitly have a public and didactic purpose and more diverse and expansive holdings.

The study of these closely related disciplines has flourished in recent years and, as they have, scholarly interests have progressed from the documentary to the more speculative. Earlier studies focused more on “who owned what, where and when.” Today our concerns are rather “how and why.” The study of collections as fixed and static repositories of objects has given way to an understanding of them as fluid entities, organic and creative in their own right. We can now look at each component object as bearing its distinct history – with a past reflecting its origin, acquisition, classification and assembling. In a sense, that is only the beginning. How a collection (and every object within it) evolves – in space, in purpose, in growth and diminution and changes of ownership – is subject to our examination and analysis, as is its relationship to changing aspects of society and culture. These issues become all the more significant when a collection is shared with the public, as it is in a museum. Then what might have been casual decisions of presentation, description and organisation become subject to the imperatives of an administrative prospect. These are theoretically educational in principle but, as history has shown, are often influenced by a range of political, economic and social preferences. Recognising these biases not only provides a deeper insight into the times in which they were prevalent, but also can inform our current thinking into museum practice.

What is evident is that the study of collecting provides a vital and diverse perspective into the history of art and, beyond that, to our broader and encompassing history. Rather than offering an alternative to other established scholarly approaches, it provides an overlay to them. Its universality can be appreciated if we consider that collectors, having substituted coveted objects for food, are simply following in the footsteps of their hunter-gatherer ancestors.

The essays presented in this volume reflect the diversity of approaches to issues of collecting and display, both historical and current. Related issues of provenance, of the genesis and evolution of specialised collections over periods of conflict, of the museum visitor's experience in today's environment are all treated – as are the pitfalls, promises and opportunities posed by the introduction of digital media and new modes of visitor engagement into the traditionally passive experience of museum-going.

# CHAPTER ABSTRACTS

## **Chapter One**

**Leah R. Clark**

Representations of “foreign” objects frequently appear in Italian renaissance paintings, particularly in the domestic settings of religious narratives, underlining the virtuosity of artists as well as collectors’ fascination with such objects. Indeed, the artefacts meticulously depicted throughout renaissance works point to the diversity of goods available in Italy, highlighting fifteenth-century collecting sensibilities, which were formed through the movement of goods and people. From the glass receptacles and metal candlesticks found on the shelves of saints in their studies to the colourful tiles or oriental carpets that grace the floors in devotional works, these objects point to the variety of goods collected and put on display in Italian households, but they also adorn the cabinets of many museums today and raise questions about how we display the past.

This study thus also addresses very pressing questions about today’s encounters with such objects in museums. Many of these objects are “composites”, reflecting two or more cultural traditions and thus do not easily fit into one national category. How can museums convey the transculturality of these objects as well as their reception over time? How do art historical categorisations obscure or even misconstrue the “hybrid” nature of these works? How does art history with its legacies of nineteenth-century nationalism and colonialism address objects that deny a fixed place of manufacture? In what ways do our contemporary display practices and academic publications perpetuate an East/West dichotomy and Orientalist tendencies? These are all difficult questions that this essay addresses, by looking at past and present collecting and display strategies.

## **Chapter Two**

**Andrea M. Gáldy**

The *kunst- and wunderkammer* has long been in the focus of the scholarly engagement with princely collections and early museums. Over the past c.40 years, research has increased our theoretical knowledge about this type of room and its contents but not necessarily our understanding of its function and of the reasons behind its diversity. While several exemplars and their contents survive – at least in part – they do not always make for

easy display. Often distributed over several museums or separated from their original contexts, the architectural frame and exhibits can be difficult to study as an entity or in connection to their former location. Another issue is posed by the problematic comparison between individual *kunstkammern* distributed across Europe.

Nonetheless, the ongoing popularity of *kunstkammern* means that they are not only appealing to the public, whether in reality or in reconstruction, they also remain interesting for research. Therefore, questions arise about the best way, in which to display them to a museum audience or in which to use the latest research data to further even more scholarly investigation. Virtual museums and digital *kunstkammern* may offer technical solutions on the basis of a museological occupation feeding its results into the museum display via digital media and back again.

### **Chapter Three** **Donato Esposito**

Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) and Frederic Leighton (1830–1896) were arguably the two greatest former Presidents of the Royal Academy of Arts, London. Less well known is that both were avid art collectors. Both collections functioned as extensions to their creators' role as heads of the Royal Academy and, though formed a century apart, had much in common. The contrasting motives for the formation and display of these two artists' collections will be explored against the background of the foundation and expansion of public collections in the nineteenth century.

Reynolds figured in Leighton's art collection both as illustrious practitioner and cherished former owner. Though both collections are now broken up and widely dispersed around the world, reconstructing these presidential collections will expose the overlapping private and public facets of these two deeply influential artists.

### **Chapter Four** **Florian Dobmeier**

Even though Johann Georg von Dillis's (1759–1841) life and work may nowadays be somewhat overlooked in general, he is of special importance for the holdings of the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung München (SGSM). Dillis deserves attention not just since the collection holds over 300 of his own works of art, but also for his great contribution to the set-up and organisation of what would later become the SGSM.

Dillis was a close friend of the Crown Prince (and King) Ludwig I of Bavaria, he acted as his travelling companion through France and Italy and as his personal art consultant. For over half a century, Dillis was an influential inspector of the royal art galleries in Munich – including the future SGSM – where he proved himself to be a visionary museologist. He was responsible for the first picture hang according to modern criteria, still in force, as opposed to Baroque traditions. In addition, Dillis was an accomplished art historian as well as a skilled painter and graphical artist who influenced the development of landscape sketching and painting in southern Germany.

I seek to trace Dillis's drawings and watercolours held by the SGSM, on the basis of the collection's historical inventories. The latter are still in use after centuries; nonetheless they were susceptible to occasional errors and omissions which need to be scrutinised. Within these inventories, the entries for Dillis's works are widely scattered and prevent a straightforward overview. In the second half of my chapter, the focus lies on how selected works of art created by Dillis eventually entered the SGSM collection.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Annette C. Cremer**

University collections present a rather special case in the fields of both historical collecting and modern display. As for the historical perspective, since the seventeenth century universities have collected objects not necessarily for their value or aesthetics but as media to gain knowledge about foreign cultures, about religious customs or to develop a systematic approach to the sciences. Until the early nineteenth century, the natural approach to gaining knowledge was to learn directly from the objects by handling and touching them, comparing them to other specimens and by consulting appropriate literature. The object was at the centre of most (but not of all) disciplines.

While until very recently such treasures were hidden away and gathering dust, in 2011 the German Wissenschaftsrat advised universities to use their collections as “research infrastructures” in a landmark attempt to bring them back on display. Will this lead to new ways of using (historical) objects in research? How does it change the status of objects in research? And, how does their display differ from public museums?

## **Chapter Six**

### **Ronit Sorek and Haim Shapiro**

For the Jews of Central Europe who had emerged from a closed society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, world culture meant German culture. They looked for inspiration in German literature, art and music and they contributed to the wider culture in these fields. It is not surprising that the early Jewish artists to come to Palestine may be considered “German artists”. In this new land, with only limited resources, they created works on paper, continuing the German tradition. Later, when Jews, who were among the patrons of avant-garde art in Germany, were forced to flee the terrors of Nazism, they left their homes but remained faithful to the culture they had left behind. As art lovers who may not have been able to take large works of art with them, they brought prints and drawings that could be easily transported. They tried to recreate the atmosphere of European culture and these works of art played an important if partial effort.

Artists influenced by such movements as Jugendstil, Expressionism and Bauhaus continued in these paths, in which engravings, lithographs and particularly woodcuts were a popular form of expression. These artists became teachers at the *Bezalel Art School* in Jerusalem that influenced further generations of young artists. The school gave rise to the *Bezalel Museum* which not only acquired works from the artists themselves, but also from the immigrants who often generously donated valuable works of art and sometimes discreetly sold their possessions in moments of need.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Ignas Petronis**

The objective of this essay is to reflect upon museums and their collections in a critical way and to disclose certain important aspects of curating, exhibition making and museum and collection management in general. This objective is achieved by looking at a museum as a material and narrative building and by drawing conclusions about two different types of “building”: a “locale” and a “space”, borrowed from late Heidegger’s essay “Building Dwelling Thinking”. Likewise, two different approaches towards museology emerge and provide tools for a critical reflection on diverse museological and collecting strategies which are reinforced by looking into several case studies.

While a museum as “locale” might be described as knowledge-building and (hi-)story-telling, a museum as a “space” might be regarded as domination over the patrimony of creativity (i.e. the collection and works



of art within it) and the social (i.e. audiences). Theory inputs include the late philosophy of Martin Heidegger, Theodor W. Adorno, Michel Foucault, Claire Bishop, Douglas Crimp, Hal Foster and William J. T. Mitchell. Case studies, here taken into consideration, cover different practices: Thomas Hirschhorn's installation *Musée precaire Albinet* in Aubervilliers (2004), Fred Wilson's installation *Mining the Museum in the Maryland Historical Society* and the collaboration between the Van Abbemuseum and the International Academy of Art Palestine on *Picasso in Palestine* as well as their comparison with classical Western art museums' strategies.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Ned Bartlett**

The art gallery has long been a place of eyes-only interaction, where the proverbial velvet rope keeps patrons the requisite distance from paintings, sculptures and prints. In recent years, however, a trend in interactive and touch-based art has challenged the long-held taboo of touching, bringing with it a host of new questions and concerns for gallery staff. Indeed, as museums increasingly use participatory art to attract families and other new patrons and as new evidence emerges about the place of touch in art, the use of interactivity and touch has become a growing concern for curators who must strike a delicate balance between conserving the piece's physical integrity and exhibiting the work as it was intended. Perhaps due to this concern, the use of interactive and touch based works is still a site of struggle in the gallery world, as gallery staff struggle with funding and the calls for edutainment.

In this chapter, I begin with an exploration into the ways, in which the ritual of the gallery space has been constructed in popular thought through an investigation of the history of touch in collections. I then examine the discourses evident in the theoretical and practical foundations and concerns that underpin the growing field of interactive and touch-based art. Finally, I problematise the importance and place of interactivity and touch-based artwork in modern museum programming.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Sara Hatla Krogsgaard**

In recent years, much priority has been given to how the museum can recontextualise and thus revitalise collections in a meaningful way. This taps into the changing museum landscape and the ongoing quest to meet new demands and attract new audiences. The Danish art museum Ordrupgaard holds an extensive collection of French impressionist painting including

works by, amongst others, Manet, Monet, Renoir and Degas.

In 2013, Ordrupgaard initiated an art park where high profile contemporary artists are engaged on projects created for the specific environment. The museum's core identity thus indicates diverse inspirations and possible themes. Taking the collection as well as Art Park Ordrupgaard as its point of departure the chapter discusses the specific challenges that Ordrupgaard is facing in terms of collecting and attracting (new) audiences. Of special importance is the static status of the museum's French collection in terms of extending and purchase.

Other questions that will be raised are: How do we create a museum that is no longer just for the few but for the many, with the collection at the heart of the matter? How do we define the museum as a dynamic and living venue? When art history is not enough, what more can we offer? How do we approach the museum as a social space (and not a cathedral)? How do we go from local to global? How do we manifest the museum as a holistic experience? And, last but not least, how do we address new audiences, in particular students and families with children who at present are not very well represented among the visitors?

## CHAPTER ONE

# REPRESENTING THE WORLD: COLLECTING AND DISPLAY IN THE RENAISSANCE AND TODAY<sup>1</sup>

LEAH R. CLARK

Representations of “foreign” objects frequently appear in Italian renaissance paintings, particularly in the domestic settings of religious narratives, underlining the virtuosity of artists as well as collectors’ fascination with such objects. Indeed, the artefacts meticulously depicted throughout renaissance works point to the diversity of goods available in Italy, highlighting fifteenth-century collecting sensibilities, which were formed through the movement of goods and people. From the glass receptacles and metal candlesticks found on the shelves of saints in their studies to the colourful tiles or oriental carpets that grace the floors in devotional works, these objects point to the variety of goods collected and put on display in Italian households, but they also adorn the cabinets of many museums today and raise questions about how we display the past.

Renaissance collecting was intrinsically linked to diplomatic and trading networks across the Mediterranean and further afield. Material objects such as ceramics, glassware and metalwork, as this essay will argue, were not merely stationary objects in princely collections but point to the activities taking place within and outside the *studiolo*, acting as material memories of cross-cultural exchanges, mercantile routes,

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter has been largely informed by research conducted during a British Academy/Leverhulme grant. Much of my thinking around display today and in the Renaissance has been defined through the production of an Open University Art History module, A344, Art and its Global Histories. I thank my colleagues at the Open University for discussions and debates. Thanks too to Marta Ajmar who filmed with me at the V&A and brought out the global connections of many of the objects discussed here.

territorial expansion and the pursuit of knowledge. This study also addresses very pressing questions about today's encounters with such objects in museums. Many of these objects are "composites", reflecting two or more cultural traditions and thus do not easily fit into one national category. How can museums convey the transculturality of these objects as well as their reception over time? How do art historical categorisations obscure or even misconstrue the "hybrid" nature of these works? How does art history with its legacies of nineteenth-century nationalism and colonialism address objects that deny a fixed place of manufacture? In what ways do our contemporary display practices and academic publications perpetuate an East/West dichotomy and Orientalist tendencies? These are all difficult questions that this essay addresses, by looking at past and present collecting and display strategies.

### Mobile Things

A painting of Saint Jerome in his study by Domenico Ghirlandaio in the church of Ognissanti in Florence dating from 1480 displays a number of objects produced in various locations made out of a variety of materials (**Fig. 1**). Many of these objects were mobile or show signs of travel. While this painting is a fictional space, the objects on show do correspond to many similar ones described in contemporary inventories and custom registers.<sup>2</sup> Comparable to inventories however, the painting only showcases a collection in a moment in time, often obscuring the movement, histories and polytemporal nature of these objects.<sup>3</sup> In other words, traditional approaches to collecting practices often discuss collections in terms of ownership, focussing on a patron rather than following the trajectories of the objects. The drug jars, glass vessels, carpets, books, candlesticks and rosary beads have tales to tell of their own, revealing complex systems of exchange, migration and trade that are often neglected.

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<sup>2</sup> Much has been published on individual inventories, but for an overview of custom registers see Esch 1995, 72–87. For new approaches to inventories see Freddolini and Helmreich 2014, 1–14; Markey and Keating 2010, 283–300; Wilson 2015, 335–59; Clark 2018, 1–9.

<sup>3</sup> Recent studies have become more attentive to the mobility of objects and their temporal and cultural layers. See, for example, Shalem 2012, 69–86; Rodini 2018, 246–65; Burghartz, Burkart, and Göttler 2016; Saurma-Jeltsch and Eisenbess 2010; Martin and Bleichmar 2015.

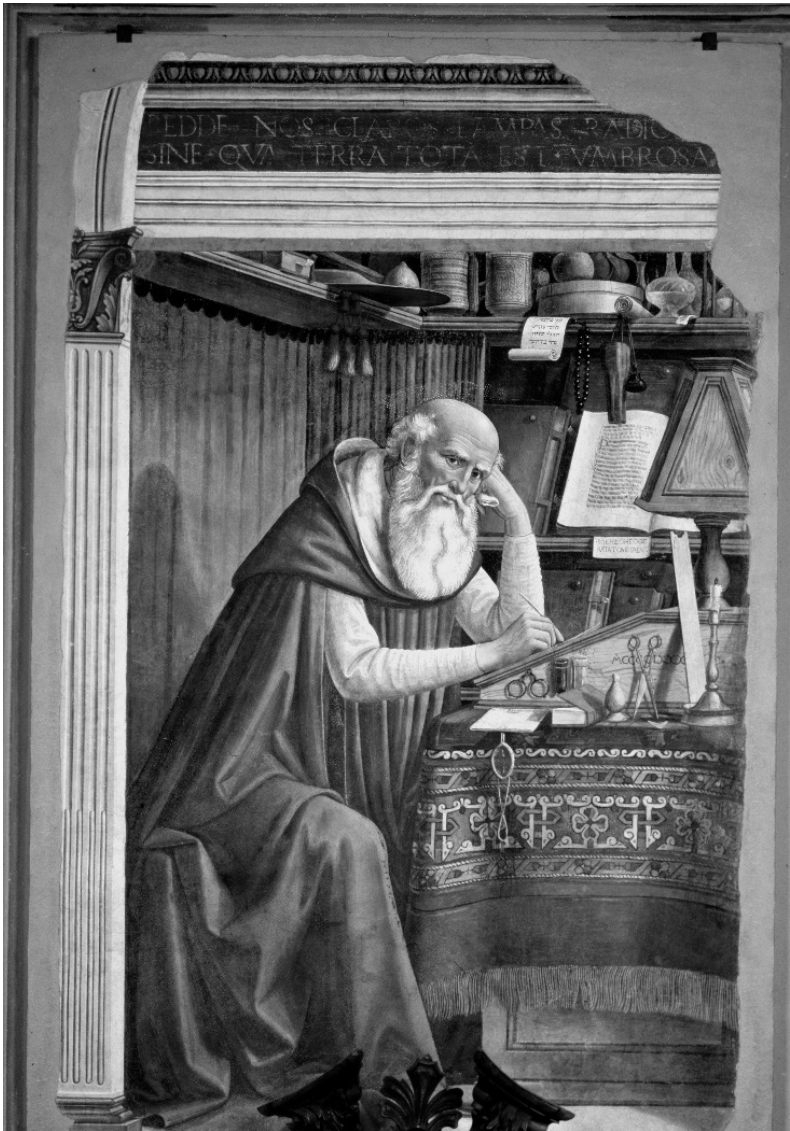


Figure 1: Domenico Ghirlandaio (Domenico Bigordi) (1449–1494), *St. Jerome in his Study*, 1480, fresco, Ognissanti, Florence, Italy (source and © Bridgeman Images).

Renaissance collecting was an activity that went beyond a man in his study. Rather, the ways objects found their way into a collection could be complex. Thus collecting spaces, such as the Italian *studiolo*, were like entrepôts, where diverse objects from around the world converged, encountered one another and often were dispersed again as they were given away, sold, transformed or reinstalled somewhere else.<sup>4</sup> Objects placed in a study might carry with them associations from far away places, or they may gain new symbolism as they entered into new cultural spheres, transforming into new things, as they served novel functions. Collecting was a sociable activity, one predicated on buying, trading, pawning, loaning, gifting and receiving items that involved interactions with agents, friends, fellow collectors, merchants and a range of intermediaries.<sup>5</sup> The objects collected often travelled much further than the collector may ever have done in his or her lifetime, yet even stationary objects often reflect cultural pluralities rather than monolithic or stable identities.<sup>6</sup>

Take for example the two drug jars or *albarelli*, on the shelf, directly above Saint Jerome (**Fig. 1**). A search for a drug jar in an online collection database such as those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Victoria and Albert Museum, will produce a variety of jars made in a number of different countries. The jar on the left with its horizontal registers might be referencing similar ones made in Valencia (Manises), Spain in the middle of the fifteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The jar to the right has blue and white motifs encircling an IHS monogram, referencing Jesus Christ. It could be assumed then that this was made in a Christian context for Christian use, but production, manufacture and consumption at this time were complex processes. For example, in some cases, drug jars with European coats of arms were actually made in Syria and shipped to European consumers. In other cases, manufacture might happen closer to home, but the motifs incorporated could be from further afield. For example, an IHS drug jar in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which resembles the one in the Ghirlandaio painting, was likely made in Montelupo (Florence), but it has incorporated a leaf pattern design, known as *bryony* or *parsley-leaf*, which

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<sup>4</sup> Clark 2018, 129-54.

<sup>5</sup> Clark 2013. Thornton 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Keating 2015, 732-47; Farago 1995; Martin and Bleichmar 2015.

<sup>7</sup> For example, this albarello at the V&A, museum number 487-1864: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O160616/drug-jar-unknown/> (accessed 29 November 2018).