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# 'More for beauty than for rarity': the key role of the Italian antiquarian market in the inception of American Classical art collections during the late-nineteenth century

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## Introduction

It is very surprising that there has been a buyer of such vases unless we assume that they were destined for some American museum; since everybody knows that the Americans, without any particular knowledge of art history and without leaving their country of origin, buy art on commission. They trust the archaeological knowledge of the people they appoint for the purchases. If this attitude were true it should be deplored. That is, those who should be in charge of the study and the conservation of the national cultural heritage procure its export abroad instead. Neither is it commendable to sell foreigners (even if Americans) mediocre objects as if they were works of art or monuments with a true value or archaeological interest (Chigi to Fiorelli, December, 1889).<sup>1</sup>

Although this excerpt is not from an official document but from a private letter addressed to the head of the Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts by an employee of the office, the quotation above makes it clear that the idea that Americans were not able to understand and evaluate Classical art was taken for granted in late-nineteenth-century Italy and even pervaded state institutions. The statement shows how both the artistic taste and the connoisseurship of the American collectors were underestimated by Roman scholars when the collectors were first encountered at the end of the nineteenth century. Clearly, this superficial statement did not take into account the real damage that the growing interest in antiquities in the United States could have caused – and eventually did cause – in Italy.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe a particular historical period, which runs from the late 1880s to the first decade of the

twentieth century, when American collectors and museums began to express interest in purchasing antiquities from the Mediterranean area and particularly from Italy. During this first period, though, the Americans timidly approached the Italian market, starting to purchase small objects via occasional intermediaries. Two cases, reconstructed using archival sources, will show how Latour's actor-network theory (1987, 2005) can be applied to explain the dynamics of the antiquarian trade between Italy and the United States in that particular time frame. The archaeological objects, their true or presumed place of discovery, the scholars who studied them and the art dealers and collectors who sold and bought them can be interpreted as actors/actants able to produce and spread scientific knowledge.

The geographies of knowledge theory (Livingstone, 2003) is also useful to highlight the existence of a strict relationship between the 'sites' where knowledge was created, the subjects that were allowed to access those 'sites' and the way that knowledge was spread. Livingstone writes:

Just how knowledge embedded in a particular location moves from its point of origin to general circulation, and thereby transcends locale, is an inherently spatial question and introduces a crucial dynamic to the geography of science. Rather than being understood simply as an inevitable consequence of a uniformly constant nature, the universality of science is the consequence of a variety of practices that have had to be put in place to guarantee reliable transmission (Livingstone, 2003: 181).

In the two cases examined, networks of scholars, dealers and collectors played a key role in promoting increasing purchases of antiquities outside Italy.

At the end of the nineteenth century, many Italian scholars of Classical antiquity believed they held the 'gold standard' in their field of study. A few years earlier, the Director-General of Antiquities and Fine Arts Giuseppe Fiorelli had written in an official report on the service he directed:

the foreigners themselves, who contend with us for possession of our objects, need an official seal that only the Government authority can give, which is fundamental to assess the scientific value of those objects (Fiorelli, 1885).<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, Fiorelli continues, foreign museums could increase the value of their collections only by buying objects which had been studied in Italy. In this way already well documented archaeological finds would not be exported abroad as 'refugees', but as 'settlers' of Italian culture.

The 'settlers', as Fiorelli refers to them, are akin to the concept of 'immutable mobiles' that Latour developed in 1987. They are a form of knowledge in movement, they can cover distances and they can make science accessible far from its 'site' of origin (Latour, 1987, 2005).

In late-nineteenth-century Rome the exporting of archaeological finds and of antiquities from private collections was already a widespread phenomenon. Many collectors, art dealers and intermediaries gained great benefits and personal profit. The market was very fluid and it benefited from the lack of strict legislation. After unification of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, it took many years before a law was passed to regulate the circulation of antiquarian objects. The main difficulty in regulating the export of antiquities was the Italian Parliament's clear intention not to limit private property in any way. Anyone who owned an archaeological object or a piece of art could dispose of it, like any other goods. Accordingly, the antiquarian market could take advantage of this situation at least until 1902 when eventually a law was passed (Law of 12 June 1902, n. 185), but it was only in 1909 that the law became coherent and effective (Law of 20 June 1909, n. 364) (Mattaliano, 1975: 3–89; Bencivenni, Dalla Negra, Grifoni, 1987, 1992; Barnabei and Delpino, 1991). As a consequence it very often happened that the network of the experts who could establish the importance – and the value – of an archaeological piece coincided with that of the state officials in charge of protecting cultural heritage. No scholar, archaeologist or even state official had not been called upon at least once to give an opinion on a purchase, to write a report to support the granting of an export permit or to provide an estimate of the market value of an artwork. Consequently, they often crossed the boundaries between archaeology and antiquarianism, conservation and collecting, legal and illicit. As a result, often scholars who were in contact with the unofficial channels which operated outside the law were the first to be informed of new finds or of the sale of pieces belonging to private collections.

Such was the case with two of the most famous and successful archaeologists of the time: Wolfgang Helbig and Rodolfo Lanciani. Both Lanciani and Helbig were active in a period when the possibility of creating and increasing knowledge about the ancient city of Rome was higher than it had been for centuries. The transformation of the Papal city into the new capital of the Kingdom made necessary a series of urban projects to build roads, government buildings and new districts. The high number of construction sites was revealing substantial portions of the ancient city underneath the modern one.

Lanciani's work has the considerable value of documenting what was being uncovered beneath Rome in those years while Helbig's work is of fundamental importance for showing what collections of antiquities

existed in Rome at the beginning of the twentieth century (Lanciani, 1893–1901; Helbig, 1891). Though each of them had a dynamic personality and was highly regarded in his field of study, they operated in a slightly different way in dealing with the antiquarian market and its actors.

### **Wolfgang Helbig (1839–1915)**

From 1865 Helbig was the Second Secretary of the German Archaeological Institute in Rome. In 1866 he had married Nadine, a Russian princess, and the social contacts he gained by the marriage made his house an international cultural salon (Helbig, 1927; Blanck, 2004: 670–73; Öрма and Sandberg, 2011; Moltesen, 2012: 35–49). After 1887, when he left his role at the Institute, Helbig became close to Carl Jacobsen (1842–1914), ‘the brewer’ from Copenhagen, and assumed the role of Jacobsen’s purchasing agent in Italy with a salary of 5,000 French francs a year for twenty-five years. This partnership allowed Jacobsen to purchase around 900 archaeological objects from Italy – some of them of considerable value – to be exhibited in the museum he planned to donate to his city: the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (Moltesen, 2012).

In the Roman intellectual salons – such as the Helbig’s house – antiquarianism was still a favourite topic of interest and represented a form of social amusement. Members of the international cultural aristocracy would gather to discuss new discoveries, to show off their collections and to establish networks that would allow them enrich those collections (Pollak, 1994). These circles – which continued the tradition of Classical studies as erudition – hosted scholars, collectors and art dealers in a mutual exchange of objects, information and scientific recognition that was often confused with social prestige.

Among Helbig’s most trusted friends were antiquarians such as Francesco Martinetti (1833–95) and collectors such as Michal Tyskiewicz (1828–97), as well as many nobles (such as the Sciarra, Barberini, Odescalchi, Boncompagni Ludovisi, Borghese, Orsini and Giustiniani families) who had fallen on hard times and wished to sell their collections on the antiquarian market (Tyskiewicz, 1895, 1896a, 1896b, 1897a, 1897b; Jandolo, 1935: 37–41; Barnabei and Delpino, 1991: 162–5; Pollak, 1994: 134, 221; Molinari, 1994; Moltesen, 2012: 161–88). Helbig played, without a doubt, a leading role in this antiquarian trade. Not only Jacobsen and many nobles in financial difficulties, but also Americans – who were accessing the antiquities market for the first time – very soon realised that Helbig was the person they should consult. In 1891 he wrote to Jacobsen: ‘Therefore I don’t fear the European museums so much as the Americans who have only scorn



3.1 Bronze statue of a *camillus* donated by H.G. Marquand to the Metropolitan Museum in 1897 (MMA 97.22.25). Public domain image.

for entails and the sort. I am, however, assured that they do not yet show much striking power' (Moltesen, 2012: 161). Thus, Edward Perry Warren (1860–1928), intermediary for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts from 1885, and his friend John Marshall (1862–1928), became clients of Helbig (Burdett and Goddard, 1941; Green, 1989; Sox, 1991; Murley, 2012). In addition, Henry Gurdon Marquand (1819–1902), the President of the New York Metropolitan Museum's Board of Trustees,

acquired antiquities from the Roman market between 1887 and 1896 through the mediation of Helbig (Del Collo, 2011). Marquand was a railway tycoon and became a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum in 1871. In 1889 he was appointed the Museum's second president. In its archives there are still traces of the relationship between Marquand and Helbig.<sup>3</sup> Arthur Lincoln Frothingham (1852–1923) who, between 1894 and 1896, worked at the American School of Classical Studies in Rome and acted as purchasing agent for various American museums, was also involved in the sale (Lavin Aronberg, 1983: 14–18; De Puma, 1996: 471). The purchases consisted of a series of small and medium-sized bronze objects which Marquand personally paid for and later donated to the Museum.<sup>4</sup> The most important purchases he made were a bronze statue of a *camillus* (see Figure 3.1)<sup>5</sup> – at the time considered to be of the emperor Geta – and a bronze statuette of Cybele on a cart drawn by lions (see Figure 3.2).<sup>6</sup> On 22 October 1887, Helbig sent a letter to advise that he had received the 20,000 French francs Marquand had sent to him and had used them to buy the head of the statue of Geta. The body of the statue was still in the hands of the owners with whom Helbig could not have made a legal contract because the whole sale was illegal. Helbig wrote to Marquand:

In case of a breach of contract [*sic*] I could hardly lodge a complaint as my own complicity as the affair would involve me in legal difficulties. Besides, in such critical cases as this I have found the Italians more honourable than under normal conditions (Helbig to Marquand, 22 October 1887).<sup>7</sup>

The *camillus* was the more expensive purchase, costing 60,000 *lire* plus 2,500 *lire* for export duty and 10.25 *lire* for transportation. Once acquired, the bronze required restoration. For this task, Helbig proposed a friend from Rome as the only person both trustworthy and capable of keeping the deal secret. This man was Martinetti. In 1888 he took charge of the restoration and the packaging of the statue. Arthur Frothingham saw the statue in June 1889 and found it 'a very fine work of art', and he informed Marquand that it would be sent the week after 'with the diplomatist' [*sic*] luggage, in a good shape.<sup>8</sup>

It took longer to bring the statuette of Cybele to New York. Problems arose with the owners, possibly over the export licence. On 2 May 1896 Helbig wrote:

I thank you for the 30,000 fcs, which brought in exchange 32,200 *lire*. The additional exchange I have not been able, unfortunately, to pay Mr Frothingham as I had expressly contracted with the owners of the



3.2 Bronze statuette of Cybele on a cart drawn by lions, donated by H.G. Marquand to the Metropolitan Museum in 1897 (MMA 97.22.24) Public domain image.

group at a price of 30,000 francs plus 6,393.25 *lire* (the balance on hand), and this stipulation was authorised by your letter of December 11th, 1895. You get out of the transaction very well indeed (Helbig to Marquand, 2 May 1896).

The chariot was then shipped to Paris in order to be restored. Helbig continued:

I am naturally extremely anxious that you should inform no one that I have had a part in this purchase, and it is also advisable to urge Mr Andre not to show the group to anybody in Paris. It is to be hoped that Mr Andrew [*sic*] will restore the group of Cybele as well as he has done the silver pieces from Boscoreale, whose restoration appears to have been a masterpiece (Helbig to Marquand, 2 May 1896).<sup>9</sup>

In May 1897, after the chariot arrived, Marquand donated it to the Museum together with some other objects he had bought: twenty-five Greek, Roman and Etruscan bronzes, statuettes, busts and mirrors. Among the bronzes donated to the Metropolitan Museum are the following items:<sup>10</sup> a statuette of an *ephebe* resembling the Polykleitos *Doryphoros* and *Diadoumenos*;<sup>11</sup> a fragment of a moulding from the Pantheon;<sup>12</sup> the head of a grotesque from the Tiber;<sup>13</sup> a statuette of Aphrodite with apple from Santa Maria Capua Vetere;<sup>14</sup> two Etruscan mirrors;<sup>15</sup> a helmeted bust of Minerva;<sup>16</sup> and a statuette of Jupiter Capitolinus.<sup>17</sup> Other objects remained in his private collection which was sent to auction in 1903 after his death (Kirby, 1903).<sup>18</sup> In the *Boston Evening Transcript* of 30 January 1903 an anonymous journalist, describing Marquand's activity, wrote that the collector had bought objects 'more for beauty than for rarity' (anon., 1903).

Helbig expressed the wish to remain anonymous several times in his letters. This is the reason why his name never appears in the catalogues published by the Metropolitan Museum. It may be wondered why Helbig wished to keep his purchasing activity secret since it was probably public knowledge – judging by the number of clients and contacts he had. Carl Jacobsen even gave Helbig's name to the Etruscan Gallery of the Ny Carlsberg to pay homage to his friend (Poulsen, 1927). Was it perhaps that he did not want to enrage the Italian authorities? Or that he did not wish to be associated with small, occasional and worthless purchases? The question remains unanswered. However, we can hypothesise. We can take as an example the well known case of the *Fibula prenestina*, a gold *fibula* with an inscription that seems to be one of the first written attestations of the Latin language. Thanks to his friendship with the art dealer Francesco Martinetti, Helbig had the opportunity to be the first to see the object. He was also the first to publish an article on the *fibula*, strongly linking his name to it (Helbig, 1887). In recent years, its dubious origin – place of discovery unknown – led the *fibula* to be considered a fake created by Martinetti and validated by Helbig (Guarducci, 1980, 1984). Recent studies, though, have demonstrated the authenticity both of the object and the inscription (Franchi De Bellis, 2011; De Simone, 2011; di Gennaro et al., 2015). The *fibula* affair shows that the dubious or uncertain origin of the archaeological material did not discourage Helbig from publishing his article. It seems more likely then that Helbig did not want his name to appear in the catalogues of the Marquand collection in order not to reveal his network of contacts, especially in a rising market such as the American antiquarian market. It was probably more important to him to be officially part of an Italian/European network and to occasionally work for American collectors and museums only as a source of income.

### **Rodolfo Lanciani (1845–1929)**

During the same period another episode occurred which involved the renowned archaeologist Rodolfo Lanciani, who worked from an early age for the Italian government, for Rome's city council and for La Sapienza University in Rome, where he was Professor of Ancient Topography between 1894 and 1922 (Palombi, 2006).<sup>19</sup> Lanciani had always particularly admired the Anglo-Saxon world and in 1886–87 he was invited by several American universities – including Harvard, Princeton, Pennsylvania and Columbia Universities – to give a series of lectures, which were met with huge success (Palombi, 2006: 113–22). It was probably on these occasions that he met the directors of the Chicago and Boston museums who asked him to contribute to the growth of the museums' collections. In the 1950 Boston museum catalogue can be read 'Mr Robinson immediately began to urge upon the trustees the importance of acquiring original works of art, especially sculpture and vases, and in 1888, with the help of Professor Rodolfo Lanciani, whose interest in the Museum had been aroused when he came to Boston to lecture in 1887, a number of marbles, heads and portrait busts, as well as selected terracottas, bronzes, vases and coins from Italy were purchased' (Chase, 1950: 1).

It was his agreeing to assist US cultural institutions that cost Lanciani his reputation. In 1889, the archaeologist was accused by the Italian Minister of Public Education of having acted as intermediary for the sale of numerous artefacts to the United States. The event represented a significant setback in Lanciani's professional life; at the peak of his career he was forced out of his professional positions, except for his teaching post at La Sapienza University (Palombi, 2006: 122–47). Ironically, the first accusations were made by the Director of the New York Metropolitan Museum: Count Luigi Palma di Cesnola (1832–1904) – an Italian who certainly had another motive than the protection of the antiquities in his country of origin – reported the practice of antiquities trafficking (Roversi, 1898; McFadden, 1971; Moncasoli Tribone and Preacco, 2004; Damilano, 2014). Subsequently, the Ministry of Public Education launched an investigation during which depositions were collected from Lanciani's colleagues confirming his connection to the antiquarian market (Barnabei and Delpino, 1991: 458–62, documents 6 and 8). Of the famous Lanciani Inquiry there is no trace in the official publications of the Ministry of Education. However, the documents were scrupulously safeguarded by Felice Barnabei, Deputy Director of Antiquities and Fine Arts and arch-enemy of Lanciani.<sup>20</sup>

What is certainly true is that from December 1887 Lanciani corresponded with Charles Loring and Edward Robinson, respectively the

President and the Director of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, proposing works of art that he would acquire on their behalf from the antiquities market of Rome (Whitehill, 1970: 21–2; Dyson, 1998: 133).<sup>21</sup> Charles G. Loring (1828–1902) had been a general in the American Civil War and became the first President of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. In 1885 Edward Robinson (1858–1931) was appointed Curator of Classical Art and in 1902 Director of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. In 1905 he resigned and later that year he was hired by the New York Metropolitan Museum.

The relations between Lanciani and his fellow scholars were cordial; also, their families were involved in a reciprocal exchange of greetings and invitations, both to America and to Italy. Probably as a result of earlier agreements, the Boston Museum placed a sum of money at Lanciani's disposal with Rothschild's Italian branch. In January 1888, Lanciani complained to Loring about the immobility of the antiquarian market after the scandal at the building site for Vittorio Emanuele's monument (Coppola, 2009). Many coins found during the construction work were illegally sold by the workers and from that point the authorities became more suspicious. In his letters Lanciani focused on the market's dynamics:

[B]etter to bargain with the producers: only these producers are becoming a myth! Since I came back two excavations only have been undertaken by private individuals: one in the Artemisium of Nemi by Signor Boccanera one in the Caere necropolis by the town clerk of Cerveteri. The Boccanera finds were *hors ligne*; and out of question for the sum you kindly put at my disposal. There was a statue of a man named Fundilius, a greek roman masterpiece of the augustan era [*sic*]; how I wished I could buy it for you! It has gone now to Denmark price paid 1400 dollars (Lanciani to Loring, 6 January 1888, original emphasis).<sup>22</sup>

He also complained about the difficulty in obtaining valuable objects:

I firmly believe that, as far as the Italian antiquarian markets (the roman [*sic*] especially) are concerned, there are only two mines open for foreign Museums – namely – terracottas and busts. Statues, bronzes, inscriptions, mosaic works are out of question. Government and municipalities are extremely jealous of anything which may be suspected, right or wrong, to be of local interest: and strict orders have been given to the officers of the export bureau (Rosa, Tadolini and De Sanctis) to stop the migration abroad of first rate works and objects of local interest. The field within which limits I was allowed to act is exceedingly limited, still I hope to have succeeded [*sic*] to your full satisfaction (Lanciani to Loring, 30 May 1888).<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Lanciani regularly advised his correspondents about the antiquities market and the direction the museum should follow in order to expand its collections:

The experience I have gained in these last months tells me that the only archaeological objects and works of classic art that can be found on the Roman and Italian market, are terracotta, busts and coins. Would you believe that since October '87 only four inscriptions have been put out for sale? I have, of course, given up the idea of making a collection of them, from a chrono-paleographic point of view. My hope is that the authorities of the Boston Museum will decide on a very limited number of 'specialties' in future acquisitions. Would you not like the idea to get in the Museum the finest collection of busts in Europe and America, Italy excluded? or else the finest collection of terracottas? I believe it could be done in a short time (Lanciani to Loring, 16 February 1888).<sup>24</sup>

Despite the market crisis, Lanciani managed to buy several objects between 1888 and 1889.<sup>25</sup> In these instances, he made the purchases personally and, talking about some terracottas from Cerveteri,<sup>26</sup> he wrote:

I have selected the specimens with the view that they should exhibit – in a small scale – all the characteristics of the great Cerveteri find. Gave 600 *lire* for them... The price is perhaps a little high but I had to contend against Helbig who was bidding for the Berlin Museum, and against Alberici who has become the most powerful monopoliser of antiques in Rome (Lanciani to Loring, 27 February 1888).<sup>27</sup>

Among the first purchases made in the winter of 1888, there can be found several busts,<sup>28</sup> and a series of coins.<sup>29</sup> In March 1888, Lanciani was able to buy further artefacts from Rome and its surroundings,<sup>30</sup> and another series of busts.<sup>31</sup> During the following winter Lanciani again bought numerous terracottas from the Tiber,<sup>32</sup> and a series of busts sold as items probably belonging to the Ludovisi collection.<sup>33</sup> The final shipment is dated to April 1889, shortly before the scandal broke, and it contained a series of ceramics from southern Italy.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, Cesnola accused Lanciani of also purchasing a number of vessels and artefacts which had featured in the 1889 Chicago Art Institute catalogue, such as Greek vases purchased by the Neapolitan judge Augusto Mele,<sup>35</sup> and objects from contemporary Roman excavations sold by the antiquarian Alberici, including busts, marble and terracotta items.<sup>36</sup> In fact, these items had been purchased by Charles Hutchinson (1854–1924) – President of the Museum – and by William French (1834–1914) – Director of the Art Institute – during a visit to Italy in 1888–89 (Alexander, 1994; De Puma, 1994; Hillard, 2010). In

his travel notebook, French often mentioned Lanciani, who undoubtedly offered the two men valuable advice and useful addresses. Lanciani suggested the names of many art dealers (Marinangeli, Alberici, Innocenti and Fausti in particular) and French annotated the list in his notebook with the addresses of the shops; on 8 April 1889, he wrote a list of the objects purchased (French, 1889: 16–18). In truth Lanciani did have a friendly correspondence with Hutchinson at the Boston Museum, advising him on the procedures for requesting an export permit, packing and shipping.<sup>37</sup> Lanciani had received a sum of money to spend on behalf of the Chicago Art Institute which, however, he decided to send back in 1890 because of the problems that the investigation were causing him.

Meanwhile, by 12 March 1890 the report of the Ministerial Committee of Inquiry had been issued (Barnabei and Delpino, 1991: 472, document 16). The report focused on allegations against Lanciani, who in his capacity as a government official was accused of travelling to America to seek business clients, grant permits to excavate and request a subscription for the National Roman Museum; it noted that he held a monopoly on the excavations and discoveries in Rome. Up until then, Lanciani had not been able to defend himself. He did so in private with a letter to Fiorelli (Barnabei and Delpino, 1991: 464, document 10), and officially with a statement of defence (Barnabei and Delpino, 1991: 472–6, document 18),<sup>38</sup> that just preceded his request for exemption from his official post at the Ministry of Public Education on 30 December 1890. In both cases, Lanciani admitted that he had offered informal consultancy to the directors of Boston and Chicago museums, claiming he provided consultancy only for absolutely legal and traceable purchases.

However, the role played by Lanciani, as it emerges from the documents in Boston and Chicago, was not simply that of a consultant. The archaeologist was personally involved in the selection and purchase of objects and he knew how to act in the market and which dealers to approach. Not only was he aware of the bureaucratic procedures for obtaining export licences; he also obtained them for his clients. On 27 February 1888 he wrote to Loring in what seems to be an attempt at partial justification and an explanation of his activities:

You may be curious to know why I take such pleasure, such real delight in making these little purchases for you or the Boston Museum. In a general line, when I can show a little gratitude for the glorious time I had in the States, I welcome the occasion. But there is also a personal selfish consideration besides! The few dollars I have spent, on your behalf, have made me learn more about new finds, secret finds, clandestine finds, than I should have learned by myself in five years! I have discovered places and dealers of the existence of which I never had a suspicion; and better than all, I have now the confidence of these men. I am no more an

official of the State, a public Inquisitor etc.; no. I am a Collector myself! The consequence is that they dont [*sic*] lie any more about the origin and the 'provenance' of the objects and that, as a rule, I am the first to know what happens underwater. You see, I am, *votre obligé* (Lanciani to Loring, 27 February 1888, author's emphasis).<sup>39</sup>

The archaeologist really seems to identify himself as a purchasing agent. Maybe he did so as a *divertissement*. But it must be taken into account that this kind of activity allowed him to deal face to face with dealers and to learn more, not only about the antiquarian market, but also about the trafficking and looting of antiquities, even though it is not easy to reconcile this trading activity with Lanciani's role as a state official of the Ministry of Public Education. Aware of this conflict, he tried to minimise his role in an attempt to defend himself. It is very likely, though, that his scientific work benefited from the kind of information he talks about in his letter.

Lanciani was not only the intermediary for the archaeological objects he acquired, but also – as a well known scholar – he provided important scientific data and information. He put a sort of seal of knowledge on the 'immutable mobiles' which were going to be exhibited in American museums.

In a role play between the Italian scholars – who were creators and mediators of a knowledge related to the archaeological objects found in Italy – and the American museum curators – who had to spread that knowledge by exhibiting those objects – a new idea of 'museum' was created. As Livingstone writes:

While its architecture was intervening in the cultural struggles of late Victorian society, the museum as an institution did much to promote what has been called an object-based approach to knowing in the decades around 1900, not least in the United States. In a period when Chicago's Field Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, Harvard University's Peabody, and a host of similar institutions came into existence, the idea that knowledge could reside in material objects as much as in texts gripped the imagination of American intellectuals. Appropriately, apologists for museology urged that what distinguished their efforts from those of their antebellum predecessors was precisely that in the new museum specimens were viewed as objects of scientific scrutiny, not simply as spectacle (Livingstone, 2003: 38).

## Conclusion

Considering the extraordinary acquisitions that the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston went on

to make in later years, the bronzes donated by Marquand and the items purchased through Lanciani seem quite unimpressive in comparison (Tomkins, 1989: 87–92).<sup>40</sup> It is clear that the value of the purchases made through the mediation of Helbig and Lanciani is minimal, in terms both of the number of objects purchased and their artistic or archaeological value. Accordingly, where does the importance of those purchases lie?

Those first shipments of antiquities to the United States – which had been made possible as a result of the interest and the contacts of museum directors and curators such as Marquand in New York, Robinson and Loring in Boston and French and Hutchinson in Chicago – made it clear that it was possible and relatively easy to buy authentic works of art and transport them to the United States. As a consequence, the idea that acquiring collections was open not only to students and experts, but also to the general public – whose interest in Antiquity was growing fast – started to develop. Soon, American collectors and curators would no longer be satisfied with small, ordinary objects: they started to look for masterpieces. It was the period defined by Vermeule as ‘The Era of the Titans’ (Vermeule, 1981: 14): wealthy Americans who owned the greatest companies and banks of the country became passionate about ancient art. In those years many private collections were put together, and many of them were created to ultimately be donated to museums or become museums in their own right. Isabella Stewart Gardner in Boston, John Pierpont Morgan in New York, Edward Waldo Forbes and Paul J. Sachs in Cambridge, Massachusetts, William and Henry Walters in Baltimore, James Deering in Miami, William Randolph Hearst and his mother Phoebe Apperson Hearst in Los Angeles, are only some of the people who spent huge sums of money to buy works of art for their collections which are now open to the public (Johnston, 1999; Strouse, 2000; Chong, Lingner and Zahn, 2003; Orcutt, 2006; Rybczynski and Olin, 2007; Levkoff, 2008; Higonnet, 2009). This new philanthropic activity made it possible for the museums’ curators to buy archaeological objects of great value which flooded into the Roman antiquities market after the Banca Romana bankruptcy scandal and the subsequent financial crisis. The era of big acquisitions meant that great American museums such as the New York Metropolitan Museum or the Boston Museum of Fine Arts could compete with their European counterparts.

The American museums began to manage their acquisitions by the mediation of salaried agents in Rome who made purchases on their behalf. This network made the transactions easier, allowed faster connections and facilitated profitable deals. The time of amateur intermediaries had come to an end. The hope of Director-General Fiorelli that objects found in Italy could be exhibited in foreign museums not

as 'refugees', but as 'settlers' of the local culture was eventually dead. Helbig and Lanciani acted as intermediaries, following this somewhat questionable criterion of diffusion of knowledge within a network in which scholars were in the middle between collectors and antiquities dealers; but what happened shortly after completely changed the system.

Over the following decades, this new course completely shook up the entire Italian antiquarian market, which was transformed. Huge economic investments, a growing public interest in authentic works of art as well as an increasingly aggressive policy of acquisitions focusing on first-rate items contributed to American collectors dominating the European antiquities scene. The tone of the Italian State officials changed and Aldo Nasi, the Minister of Education, when he was informed about the Rogers bequest to the Metropolitan Museum, wrote to Tommaso Tittoni, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs:

If all this is true, this Ministry must be very concerned. The daily battle – often painful and always difficult – that is being fought in order to wrest what remains of our national artistic heritage out of the hands of the greedy speculators, will now become more arduous and more difficult in the face of huge funds at the disposal of the Museum of New York. To avoid being overwhelmed, the cooperation of all the Italian authorities will be necessary in order to work together to prevent, as far as we can, the outrage that they want to do to our Italy, depriving it of its most precious wealth, for which it holds an undisputed primacy in the world (Nasi to Tittoni, 26 October 1901).<sup>41</sup>

## Notes

- 1 'Come fa meraviglia che vi sia stato un acquirente di detti vasi a meno di supporre che fossero stati destinati per qualche museo Americano, poiché ognuno sa che gli americani, con poca conoscenza delle cose d'arte, e senza muoversi da casa loro, comprano gli oggetti d'arte per commissione; e si fidano della conoscenza in materia archeologica delle persone da loro incaricate di tali acquisti. Se ciò fosse è da deplorare, che persone incaricate di studiare e conservare i monumenti nazionali, o gli oggetti d'arte, ne procurino invece la esportazione all'estero. Come pure non è da lodarsi il far pagare ai forestieri (siano pure americani), oggetti scadenti come oggetti di arte o come monumenti aventi un vero valore o interesse archeologico.' (Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione Generale Antichità e Belle Arti, I versamento, busta 421, fascicolo 59–48, letter from B. Chigi to G. Fiorelli, 12 December 1889. Translation by the author).
- 2 'Gli stessi stranieri, i quali ci contendono il possesso degli oggetti nostri, hanno bisogno di quella sanzione legale che la sola autorità governativa può dare, e che serve per poter giudicare meglio del valore scientifico degli oggetti medesimi.' (Fiorelli, 1885. Translation by the author).

- 3 The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) – Archives – Correspondence; Marquand, Henry Gurdon, 1819–1902. The letters, re-organised by A.M. Del Collo, are available as part of the digital collection of the Thomas J. Watson Library at [www.metmuseum.org/art/libraries-and-research-centers/watson-digital-collections](http://www.metmuseum.org/art/libraries-and-research-centers/watson-digital-collections). The correspondence includes both Helbig’s letters in German and Arthur Frothingham’s in English. There are also Francesco Martinetti’s letters in Italian; but Marquand’s letters are missing. At the time they were received by the Museum, an English translation was provided for some of the letters in German and the quotations that follow in this chapter are taken from those translations.
- 4 The list of objects donated by Marquand is kept in MMA – Archives – Office of the Secretary Correspondence files 1870–1950 – Marquand, Henry Gurdon – Gift Bronzes 1897 Greek-Roman-Etruscan 1892, 1897–98, N 348, letter from H.G. Marquand to the trustees, 14 May 1897.
- 5 MMA 97.22.25.
- 6 MMA 97.22.24.
- 7 MMA – Archives – Henry Gurdon Marquand Papers, Letter from Wolfgang Helbig to Henry Gurdon Marquand, 22 October 1887, box 1, folder 08, items 1 and 36 (translation).
- 8 MMA – Archives – Henry Gurdon Marquand Papers, letter from Arthur Frothingham to Henry Gurdon Marquand, 21 June 1889, box 1, folder 8, item 17.
- 9 MMA – Archives – Henry Gurdon Marquand Papers, Letter from Wolfgang Helbig to Henry Gurdon Marquand, 2 May 1896, box 1, folder 8, item 35.
- 10 The inventory numbers for these items go from MMA 97.22.1 to MMA 97.22.25.
- 11 MMA 97.22.11.
- 12 MMA 97.22.23.
- 13 MMA 97.22.6.
- 14 MMA 97.22.4.
- 15 MMA 97.22.16 and MMA 97.22.17.
- 16 MMA 97.22.10.
- 17 MMA 97.22.8.
- 18 Among the objects sold at the 1903 auction which had been purchased through the mediation of Helbig we find: a middle-Corinthian black-figure *amphora* from La Tolfa near Civitavecchia (Kirby, 1903, n. 972); a red-figure *rhyton* in the shape of a deer’s head from Taranto bought by the Metropolitan (MMA 03.3.2; Kirby, 1903, n. 959); a small, marble, helmeted head of Athena resembling the *Athena Giustiniani* (Kirby, 1903, n. 985); a small marble head of Triton (Kirby, 1903, n. 984); a fragment of a marble votive relief with a woman presenting a child and a building in the background (Kirby, 1903, n. 980); a mosaic panel with four masks (Kirby, 1903, n. 1207), and a bronze group with Pan extracting a thorn from a nymph’s foot, bought for 3,000 francs and sold for US\$2,200 (Kirby, 1903, n. 998).
- 19 Lanciani’s major works include the *Storia degli Scavi di Roma e notizie intorno le collezioni romane di antichità* (Lanciani, 1902–12) and some

- popular books published in English such as *Ancient Rome in the light of recent discoveries* (Lanciani, 1888) and *The Destruction of Ancient Rome: A Sketch of the History of the Monuments* (Lanciani, 1899) while his most famous and monumental publication is the *Forma Urbis Romæ* (Lanciani, 1893–1901).
- 20 The records of the investigation have been partially published (Barnabei and Delpino, 1991: 453–79) and they are kept in the archives of the Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte (BIASA) in Rome among the Barnabei Papers.
  - 21 The correspondence is kept in the archives of the Boston Museum but only the letters written by Lanciani have been preserved. I welcome the occasion to thank Christine Kondoleon, Senior Curator of Greek and Roman Art of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) for giving me the chance to consult the documents.
  - 22 MFA – Department of Art of the Ancient World Archives – letter from Rodolfo Lanciani to Charles G. Loring – 6 January 1888. The Fundilius from Nemi was purchased by Jacobsen and it is now at the Ny Carlsberg (Johansen, 1994, n. 79).
  - 23 MFA – Department of Art of the Ancient World Archives – letter from Rodolfo Lanciani to Charles G. Loring – 30 May 1888.
  - 24 MFA – Department of Art of the Ancient World Archives – letter from Rodolfo Lanciani to Charles G. Loring – 16 February 1888.
  - 25 In all, 187 objects were purchased through the mediation of Lanciani (10 of which were later de-accessioned), plus 168 coins (64 later de-accessioned). The online collection database associates Lanciani's name also with the sale of a bronze bust of Augustus (MFA 90.163) which Samuel D. Warren (Edward Warren's brother) donated to the museum in 1890 and of an *amphora* (MFA 41.913) donated by Edward Jackson Holmes in 1941.
  - 26 Terracotta statuettes (MFA 88.353–88.364) purchased from Pennelli at a cost of 600 French francs; see Borsari (1886). On the materials from Caere in the MFA, see Nagy (2008).
  - 27 Augusto Alberici was an art dealer and his shop was situated in via dell'Olmata 52 in Rome. MFA – Department of Art of the Ancient World Archives – letter from Rodolfo Lanciani to Charles G. Loring – 27 February 1888.
  - 28 A bust of Tiberius from Civita Lavinia (today identified as Tiberius' brother Drusus) (MFA 88.346), a bust of Caligula from Porta Salaria bought from the art dealer Eliseo Borghi and today believed to be a portrait of a young man from the Trajan era (MFA 88.348) and a bust reworked as Emperor Balbinus bought from Eliseo Borghi and said to have been found in the quarter of Villa Ludovisi (MFA 88.347); a Julio-Claudian bust (now identified as Herakles MFA 88.350) purchased from Augusto Valenzi for 200 French francs; an Artemis Colonna (MFA 88.351) bought from Alessandro Fausti for 145 French francs and said to have been found in 'località Vigna del Torrione' in Grottaferrata and one bust of a woman identified with Diana (MFA 88.352), purchased from Scalabrini.
  - 29 The 168 coins dating from Julius Caesar to Justinian cost 262.75 French francs.

- 30 These purchases consisted of pottery from a tomb on the slope of Monte Cucco bought from art dealers Fausti and Alberici (MFA 88.538–88.550); pottery from a grave in the Esquiline region bought from Jandolo (MFA 88.551–88.555 and 88.610–88.612); terracottas and bronzes from the Sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis discovered by Luigi Boccanera in 1887 (MFA 88.556–88.562 and 88.613–88.628): see Robinson (1889); terracottas from Caere bought from Pennelli (MFA 88.613–88.628): see n. 35; specimens of terracotta lamps (MFA 88.571–88.582); samples of Arezzo ware, mostly from the Gardens of Caesar (MFA 88.583–88.608); Roman architectural elements, so-called ‘lastre Campana’ (MFA 88.563–88.570); Roman inscriptions and bas reliefs (MFA 88.631–88.637).
- 31 This series consisted of a head of Caius Memmius Caecilianus from Piazza dell’Esquilino bought from Jandolo for 200 *lire* (MFA 88.349: see Gatti, 1887, in part p. 179); a portrait of a Roman in the Republican veristic style (MFA 88.638, de-accessioned); a bust of Domitian from Tusculum (MFA 88.639); a portrait of Julia as Artemis (MFA 88.641, de-accessioned); a Julio-Claudian portrait of a girl (MFA 88.642); a little Greek Venus (MFA 88.640, de-accessioned); a head of an African man (MFA 88.643); a bust of Ajax (MFA 88.644, de-accessioned).
- 32 MFA 89.9–89.31.
- 33 The series consisted of a head of Mercury with the *petasos*, now considered a forgery (MFA 89.2); a head of a faun (MFA 89.3); a bust of the Emperor Maximin (MFA 89.4); a head and a bust of Domitian (MFA 89.5 and 89.6); a bust of Minerva (MFA 89.7) and an idealised female head, perhaps a Muse, according to Lanciani (MFA 89.8).
- 34 They were vases (MFA 89.256–89.263; 89.266a–b; 89.268; 89.269a–b; 89.272; 89.273; 89.275; 89.561 and 89.562) purchased from Pio Marinangeli and allegedly found at Corneto Tarquinia, Capua, Nola and Ruvo.
- 35 Including a red-figure *crater* from Nola (Art Institute of Chicago, 1889, n. 301; ARTIC 1889.16) and a black-figure vase from Orvieto (Art Institute of Chicago, 1889, n. 341; ARTIC 1889.10)
- 36 Anon (1889, nn. 364, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379). The Art Institute of Chicago. Palombi also identifies (Anon, 1889, n. 363) a terracotta statuette of a woman (Palombi, 2006: 134–5, n. 192).
- 37 Palombi identified, among the Lanciani Papers at the BIASA, a letter from Cesnola to French which the latter forwarded to Lanciani. Cesnola was seeking advice on the purchases and French sent a reply on 22 March 1890: ‘The few marble sculptures from Rome which we possess were bought from dealers in Rome: I suppose the New York Museum would have no difficulty in picking up a few good objects in the same way’, and further, ‘I carried a letter of instructions to Sig. Lanciani from his sister-in-law, who lives here, which led him very kindly to give some advice about the purchases. I felt grateful, and expressed it in the catalogue. The greater part of our collection came from Naples, where it was inspected by another expert. I do not know Mr Helbig, but I should expect that either he or Sig. Lanciani would be willing to assist any American Museum in the same way the latter

- did us' (Palombi, 2006: 138–9, footnote 196). Furthermore some letters written by Lanciani to Hutchinson are preserved at the Newberry Library in Chicago dating from April 1889 to August 1892 (Newberry Library Archives – Charles L. Hutchinson Trustees President Correspondence – F–Z 1883–1924, Box 1).
- 38 A letter of defence written by Martin Brimmer, President of the Trustees of the MFA, was attached to the statement (Palombi, 2006: 137, n. 195).
- 39 MFA – Department of Art of the Ancient World Archives – letter from Rodolfo Lanciani to Charles G. Loring – 27 February 1888.
- 40 In 1901, the Metropolitan Museum received a donation of US\$5 million from the railroad magnate Jacob S. Rogers. This allowed the purchase of artworks of incredible value, such as the Roman frescoes from Boscoreale, the Monteleone chariot and the Giustiniani marbles. In 1903, thanks to the intermediation of Warren, a seated female statue without its head (MFA 03.749) from Vasciano (Todi) arrived in Boston (Pasqui, 1900) while in 1909 the 'Boston Throne' (MFA 08.205) finally reached the Museum of Fine Arts.
- 41 'Se tutto ciò è vero, questo Ministero dev'essere ben preoccupato. La lotta quotidiana, spesso penosa, difficile sempre, che si combatte per strappare dalle mani degli avidi speculatori quel che ancora rimane del nostro patrimonio artistico nazionale, diventerà ora, di fronte alle ingenti somme di cui può disporre il Museo di New York, più aspra e più difficile; e per non restare sopraffatti, occorrerà la cooperazione di tutte le autorità italiane, aspiranti ad un solo intento, quello di prevenire, fin quando è possibile, l'oltraggio che si vuol fare all'Italia nostra, spogliandola della ricchezza più cara e per la quale tiene nel mondo un primato indiscutibile.' (Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione Generale Antichità e Belle Arti, III versamento II parte, busta 323, fascicolo 613–8, letter from A. Nasi to T. Tittoni, 26 October 1901. Translation by the author.)