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Book Review: Ancient Mediterranean Art

Bridget Sandhoff

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Book Review

Ancient Mediterranean Art

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Ancient Mediterranean Art. The William D. and Jane Walsh Collection at Fordham University edited by **Barbara Cavaliere and Jennifer Udell** with contributions by **Amanda Anderson, Sarah E. Cox, Richard Daniel De Puma, Jason W. Earle, Sarah B. Graff, Anne C. Hrychuk Kontakosta, Patricia S. Lulof, Anthony F. Mangieri, Maya B. Muratov, Lisa C. Pieraccini, Amy A. Sowder, Rosemarie Trentinella and Jennifer Udell**. Pp. 360, figs. 104+ (color photos), 171 b/w photos (appendix). Fordham University Press, New York, 2012. \$67.50. ISBN 9780823244522.

The genesis of this catalogue stemmed from the generous gift of William D. and Jane Walsh, who donated their sizeable collection of ancient Mediterranean art to Fordham University in 2006. Mr. Walsh's life-long passion for antiquity dates to his undergraduate days when he studied classics at Fordham in the early 1950s. Though his career took a different path (i.e., law and business), Walsh never lost his love for the ancient past. In fact, over the past thirty years, he built a collection of primarily Greek, Etruscan and Roman antiquities.

The collection includes approximately 270 pieces, which, as a whole, displays both impressive quality and a broad scope. Unfortunately, the majority of the pieces have no known provenance, which puts the legality of their acquisition and sale into question. This aspect of the collection, which Jennifer Udell's introduction largely addresses, inevitably raises issues about illegal excavation and the illicit trade of antiquities—issues that are at the forefront of the antiquities world today.¹ This is a sensitive topic, and the many sides of the debate (i.e., to

¹ Editors' note: The Etruscan Foundation and Etruscan Studies support the Archaeological Institute of America's Resolution on the Acquisition of Antiquities by Museums that states "...the governing bodies, directors and curators of Museums should, in determining the propriety of acquiring cultural property, support and be guided by the policies of the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and preventing the Illicit Export, Import and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the implementing provisions adopted by the signatory states." In doing so, we recognize the problematic nature of the Walsh Collection at Fordham University. By publishing

collect or not; to exhibit or not; to publish or not) make reasonable arguments. The university was forced to make a decision on what to do with the gift, and ultimately decided to go forward with exhibiting and publishing the collection. Their stance is reaffirmed by the opinions of John Henry Merryman, a respected art and cultural property law expert, and Udell includes a reference to one of his publications for further inquiry. Clearly, preserving the integrity of the artifacts is of the utmost importance, but in cases where documentation and the ownership history is lacking or unknown, Merryman advocates a thorough examination of unprovenanced antiquities; this type of investigation—stylistic analysis and contextual information—will, hopefully, fill in the lacuna and lessen the ethical dilemma. Thus, Fordham believes “...publishing artifacts whose original location or provenance is unknown or in question is the preferable alternative” (p. 12). Accordingly, the institution welcomes any criticisms or disputes that may result with the publication and display of the collection. And indeed, during the research phase, a Villanovan hut urn (no. 37) was proven to have been illegally acquired. The urn will be repatriated to Italy, but an arrangement with the Italian Ministry of Culture allows for the piece to remain on long-term loan in the university museum. It is a goodwill effort by Fordham University that has certainly cemented a relationship between the two institutions. More importantly, I believe the repatriation will serve as a valuable experience for students who can learn from the objects themselves as well as about the on-going debate over cultural property, ownership, restitution, ethics and law.

The broad scope of the Walsh collection fits well with one of the major goals behind Fordham University’s intent for their gift: a teaching tool for university students. The artwork acquired by the Walshes plays into this idea naturally. While the collection has several “superstar” pieces such as Archaic Greek vases and Roman imperial portraits, it also contains works that seem simple and unassuming by comparison, but are equally as beautiful (e.g., Italic votives, Etruscan white-on-red wares, Etruscan impasto vases). The Fordham students will benefit from seeing both sophisticated and “mundane” works of art firsthand. Thus, the collection creates a more complete picture of life in the Mediterranean: from the wealthiest class to the commoner, from public works to everyday objects and from the highest quality craftsmanship to the rough, perfunctory and unadorned. With the completion of this catalogue, Fordham University also introduces the collection to the greater academic community, and enhances our knowledge of the past.

this review, we hope to bring to light the inherent cultural heritage issues associated with this collection and its catalogue.

The catalogue not only features the major pieces in the Walsh Collection (the remainder is placed in the appendix), but it also highlights other objects in the university's possession: Greek and Roman coins (nos. 93–103), Roman glass (nos. 83–90), and an Attic red-figure fragment possibly painted by Makron (no. 16). The artwork is listed in numerical order, based on the museum/accession number. In the appendix, each piece includes basic information (i.e., culture, date, scale, etc.) as well as a brief description. Nearly every entry is accompanied by a small black and white photograph, which proves valuable.

The book begins with a short foreword by the collector, a list of the contributors, acknowledgments, and a brief introduction. The catalogue then addresses the collection, grouping the objects into geographical categories that run roughly in chronological order; these categories are further divided into types: Cypriot Art (pp. 14–21; nos. 1–3); Greek Art (pp. 22–119): Mycenaean, Attic, Corinthian Vases (nos. 4–19), South Italian Vases (nos. 20–32), Greek and South Italian Terracottas (nos. 33–36); Villanovan, Etruscan, and Italic Art (pp. 132–241): Villanovan Objects (nos. 37–38), Etruscan Vases (nos. 39–62), Etruscan Terracottas (nos. 63–67), Italic Votives (nos. 68–73), Etruscan Mirror (no. 74); Roman Art (pp. 242–291): Sculpture (nos. 75–82), Glass (nos. 83–90), Askos (no. 91), Figurine (no. 92); Coins (pp. 292–307): Greek (no. 93), Roman (nos. 93–103); and Ancient Near Eastern Art (pp. 308–311; no. 104).

Due to the wide range of objects, the editors recruited several specialists – a mix of veteran and young scholars – to examine, research and write about a select number of important artifacts. Standard catalogue entries appear opposite high quality, full-page photographs of the pieces. On the left-hand side of the “information page,” the basic facts are provided: culture, date, artist (if known), material, scale, and museum/accession number. After this, the contributor reports on the condition, shape and ornament and added color, if applicable. The majority of the text represents a scholar's analysis of the object, which includes citations placed at the end of the essay. In addition, information about publication references, exhibition history and former owners is also provided, and a comprehensive bibliography is included at the end of the book.

The scholarship of the entries is strong, and approaches include connoisseurship, formalist discussions (e.g., quality of the work) and contextual analysis. I commend all the scholars for an admirable job researching the individual pieces, offering their best interpretations, and providing comparable examples and textual support. The entries are insightful, and supported with ample evidence, especially in the discussions about certain myths, object usage or their creation. The essays that introduce certain types of artwork are also a particularly valuable component, given the university's educational mission; these sections include “Impasto Ware” (p. 164), “Etruscan Bucchero” (pp. 178–179), “Stamped Caeretan

Ware” (p. 184), “Etruscan Roofs and their Decoration” (pp. 196–203), “Italic Votives” (pp. 218–225), and “Roman Blown Glass” (pp. 276–278). These instructive essays offer a concise introduction to the individual pieces and provide a basic foundation of knowledge for the reader. Several entries also profit from the addition of diagrams (see the white-on-red Etruscan wares [nos. 39–40, 42–46, 48–49] and the Etruscan mirror [no. 74]), which clarify issues related to their decoration, scale or sections. The “Etruscan Roofs” section includes a reconstruction of the pediment for a temple at Vigna Marini-Vitalini (pp. 202–203) that demonstrates how the antefixes in the collection were attached to the building, along with drawings of frontal and profile views of the antefixes (nos. 63 and 66). Overall, the catalogue is cohesive, despite the number of scholars involved in its creation.

While the catalogue is easy to read and user-friendly, especially the bibliography (pp. 312–325), the absence of maps, an index and a glossary represent a major oversight. Though many of the authors annotate most of the technical or specialty terms, a glossary would be useful for those new to the topics discussed in the essays. The works are beautifully photographed and full-sized (e.g., no. 34), but more images are always appreciated. For instance, I find it helpful to see the backside of certain objects (e.g., the votives or portraits), even though they are not treated with the same attention as the front. Also, photographs of the reverse of some vases (e.g., nos. 17 and 31) are either not included or addressed in the essays. The smaller color photographs are a welcome addition, but can be difficult to “read,” especially with respect to the details of the painted Greek vases (e.g., nos. 22–23). Additionally, given that the catalogue roughly follows a chronological order, the choice to end it with a Mesopotamian piece is both odd and problematic. A few minor, technical errors with punctuation and capitalization (e.g., archaic vs. Archaic) were present, but nothing was egregious. Lastly, while it is laudable that the editors address the illegal trade of antiquities, I would like to have seen the issue taken further instead of limiting the discussion to the introduction. Unfortunately, very few entries feature any data on the artifacts’ prior history. Of the 104 objects highlighted, only 23 (nos. 10–11, 16, 19–20, 22–23, 25, 29, 32–33, 35–36, 79–81, 83–89) include information about their acquisition or publication history (i.e., published reference, previous collection, exhibition history). That said, this absence seems to “haunt” the catalogue, and poses some poignant questions about collecting practices. The inclusion of any acquisition or purchase records connected to the collection would have been advantageous, and made the Walshes and the museum’s motives more transparent.

These criticisms aside, the catalogue is a strong contribution to the field, and would be an asset for any major college or university library, even a scholar’s personal library. While the catalogue sticks true to its educational focus and

familiarizes newcomers to the field, I believe the seasoned scholar will find it equally worthwhile since many of these works are now just coming to light. Indeed, Fordham University has achieved a primary goal with the collection: to educate. Furthermore, the university's acknowledgment of the greater issue with the collection—unlawful acquisition and trade of antiquities—is significant. Whether Fordham University made the right choice or not to publish the collection, it is a positive step forward in making the larger community aware of these problems and attempting to make amends. "Although this volume cannot resolve all questions about the original archaeological context of the artifacts in Fordham's possession, by publishing the material, Fordham University has made its collection accessible to the academic community and to all those with an interest in the ancient Classical world" (p. 13).