

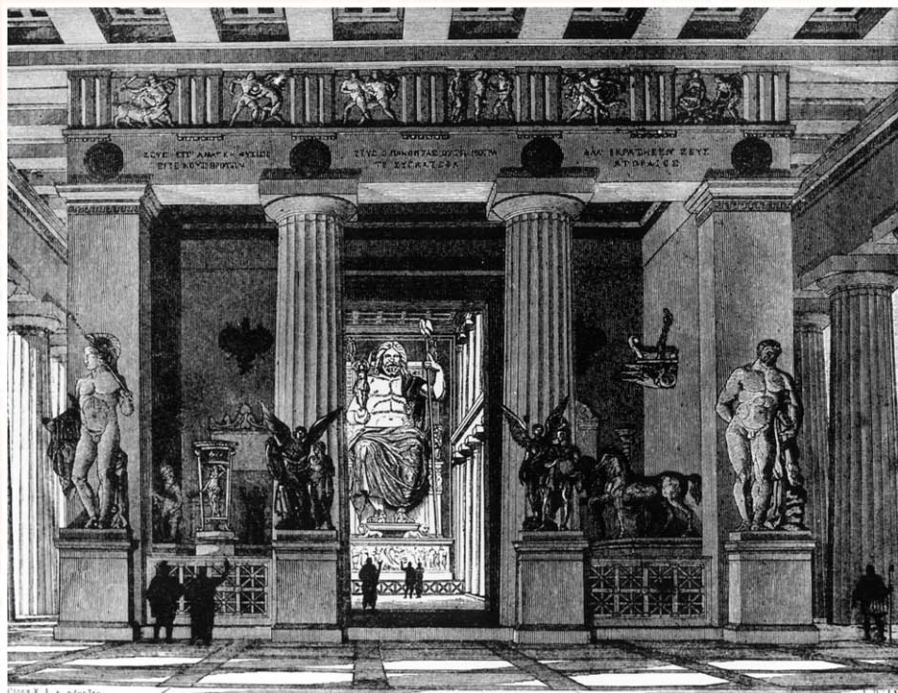
PERSPECTIVES ON COLLECTING



The **collector's voice**

VOLUME 1

Ancient Voices



Susan Pearce *and*
Alexandra Bounia

**The Collector's Voice:
Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting**

**Perspectives on Collecting
Edited by Susan Pearce
University of Leicester, UK**

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The Collector's Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting

Volume 1
Ancient Voices

Edited by
SUSAN PEARCE AND ALEXANDRA BOUNIA

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2000 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

The collector's voice: critical readings in the practice
of collecting

Vol. 1: Ancient voices

1. Antiquities – Collection and preservation – History

2. Collectibles – History 3. Collectors and collecting in
literature 4. Europe – Antiquities

I. Pearce, Susan M. (Susan Mary), 1942– II. Bounia, Alexandra

069.4'0936

US Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The collector's voice : critical readings in the practice of collecting / edited by Susan
Pearce and Alexandra Bounia and Ken Arnold.

p. cm. Contents: v. 1. Ancient voices — v. 2. Early voices.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Collectors and collecting—History. 2. Collectors and collecting—Europe—
History. 3. Collectors and collecting—Philosophy. 4. Collectors and

collecting—Social aspects. I. Pearce, Susan M. II. Bounia, Alexandra. III.

Arnold, Ken.

AM221.C65 2000

790.1'32—dc21

00-0044169

ISBN 9781859284179 (hbk)

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General Preface to Series

The study of collecting is a growth point in cultural studies. Like most exciting developments, it is on the cusp where older studies meet and stimulate each other; but it is also conceived as a study of practice, of the ways in which people make sense of the world by bringing elements together. Because we and our world are material, and our ways of understanding are tied to the physical reality of material, one of the prime ways in which this sense is created is through the accumulation and juxtaposition of material things. Following the seminal publication of Benjamin's essays and Arendt's Introduction to them (1970), a range of studies have been important in the development of our understanding in this field. Some have been in the broader field of material culture (for example Appadurai, 1986; Miller, 1985; Hodder, 1986). Others have contributed to our understanding of museums, as the institution *par excellence* which sustains and is sustained by the practice of collecting (for example Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Bennett, 1995; Pearce, 1992). Closely related to this has been the whole People's Show Project which brought contemporary collectors into museum galleries and opened up an important range of popular collecting issues (for example Lovatt, 1997). This climate of interest, linked with important studies by Baudrillard (1984), Pomian (1990) and Stewart (1984) have stimulated a number of specialised studies in the collecting field. Elsner and Cardinal have published an important collection of essays on individual collecting topics (1994) and Pearce has produced a broad analysis of collecting practice (1995) and a study of contemporary popular collecting practice (1998), while Martin has published an analysis of the relationship between collecting and social institutions at the end of the twentieth century (1999). Arnold has produced a study of the 'cabinets of curiosity' phenomenon, and Bounia and Thomason have turned their attention to ancient collecting, Bounia of the classical world (1998) and Thomason of the ancient Middle East. Flanders is working on the collecting processes associated with nineteenth-century museums, and a number of similar pieces of work are in progress.

This intellectual realisation has been matched by a flood of popular interest in collectors and collecting. The *Independent*, *The Times* and the *Guardian* now run regular collecting columns. The BBC sees ever-increasing spin-offs from the *Antiques Roadshow* programme, and the other channels, television and radio, have their own series. A parallel reverberation of the same phenomenon is seen in the extent to which collecting, used in a variety of ways, appears as a recurrent theme in contemporary fiction.

The four volumes of *The Collector's Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting* series take the perspective of the long term. The first, *Ancient Voices*, addresses collecting practice in ancient northern Europe, ancient and classical Greece and imperial Rome, and the post-Roman period through the early and high Middle Ages to the beginnings of European early modernism in the fifteenth century. The second, *Early Voices*, covers collecting during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and into the early eighteenth century. The third, *Imperial Voices*, concentrates upon nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century collectors up to about 1960. The final volume, *Contemporary Voices*, focuses attention upon the nature of collecting in the closing decades of the twentieth century. In all four volumes the written, or sometimes recorded, voices of the collectors themselves are paramount, but it is hoped that the editorial content which surrounds each text will place the quoted material in its appropriate context.

Two issues emerge clearly from what has been said: the definition of 'collecting'; and the idea of a 'European tradition' of collecting, which presupposes that the notion of a continuity of ideas and practices from one generation to another over a period of several millennia within a particular, and relatively limited, geographical area is a valid premise on which to mount investigation. Benjamin in his essay on his library (1970), and Arendt in her Introduction to his essays, both of which stand at the head of the contemporary critique of collecting practice, make the point that 'insofar as the past has been transmitted as tradition, it possesses authority; insofar as authority presents itself historically, it becomes tradition' (Arendt, 1970: 38). But this line of thought undermines the notion of tradition as an essentially valid element in the historical process; it does not break out of the human predicament which means that the only way in which to behave newly or differently is to do so in relation to a past, which is inevitably perceived as a powerful influence upon the present. And, of course, through most generations, people have not particularly wished to break dramatically with the past, but rather to improve upon it.

The generational link is essentially one of perception: individuals in each generation have an idea, by word of mouth or by reading, of what their predecessors did, and make their own use of what comes to them as the traditions of the past; and it should be recognised that the capacity to accumulate goods, and to access the traditions of the past, tend to rest with the same restricted class of people, for whom the past as they perceive it is of importance because it provides the legitimisation for their present position. To put the point slightly differently, the fostering of the notion of a broad European tradition has been an important aspect of self-identity among the collecting classes, whatever they have actually made of it, and so it must also do so in a critique of collecting practice.

The definition of 'Europe' emerges within this context as a series of self-fulfilling arguments. These centre on a broadly similar 'heroic' prehistory across Europe susceptible to interpretation along Homeric lines, and a range of shared authors writing in Greek and Latin, beginning with Homer. Christendom follows as the successor to the classical world, defined in opposition to Islam and sharing a Latin culture which endured into the eighteenth century. Thereafter is seen a common Enlightenment, a common focus on imperialist nation states, and a common disillusion as the second millennium AD closes. Outsiders have been variously defined as barbarians, non-citizens, pagans and natives, and as being unenlightened and underdeveloped, but the core area defined in terms of the perceived intellectual tradition of which collecting is a part has remained remarkably stable, historical fluctuations notwithstanding, and concentrates upon north-western Europe and the lands around the northern Mediterranean shore.

Within all this, how can 'collecting' and 'collection' be viewed usefully as an aid to the critique through personal testimony of particular material social practices? Here we have to recognise that collecting is a complex business and that a difficult path has to be taken between 'collecting' as narrowly defined in recent decades, and in relation to recent generations (see Pearce, 1995: 39–56 for a summary), and much broader 'accumulation' which contemporaries would not have seen as 'collections' in any meaningful way (although successors might). The view taken in the last three volumes of this series is that 'collectors' are left to be self-defining on the understanding that they will define themselves, of course, according to their perception of their relationship to the European tradition just discussed. The first volume takes a wider view, for reasons which are discussed in its Introduction.

The contemporary interest in collecting practices, referred to earlier, needs the core reference material which is essential to its study, and the present series addresses this need. This formative material is extremely difficult to access because it is widely scattered, exists only patchily in specialist libraries and archives, and sometimes requires translating, usually from Greek or Latin, into English. The editors have endeavoured to bring the most interesting material together, translate it if necessary, and present each piece with an introduction, explanatory notes and bibliographical references. All choice is subjective, and not all will agree with the choices made here; and the editors themselves are aware of much interesting material which has had to be omitted. But we hope that enough is offered to provide material for discussion and to provoke future review of notions about collecting practices in the European tradition.

Susan Pearce, General Editor
August 1999

Acknowledgements

Many people have helped to bring this book into being. Susan Pearce would particularly like to thank the librarians at the Society of Antiquaries, the British Library, and the Bodleian Library. Alexandra Bounia would offer her thanks especially to the State Scholarship Foundation of Greece and the Public Benefit Foundation, and Maria Kassimati, for financial support received during work on her PhD thesis (University of Leicester, Department of Museum Studies) upon which her chapters are based.

We are both grateful to Rachel Lynch, Cathrin Vaughan and others at Ashgate Publishing who have given us invaluable support, and our best thanks go to our families and friends for encouragement and support. All errors and omissions are, of course, our own responsibility.

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List of abbreviations

<i>ad Attic.</i>	Marcus Tullius Cicero, <i>Ad Atticum</i>
<i>ad Famil.</i>	Marchus Tullius Cicero, <i>Ad Familiares</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römische Welt</i>
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondence Hellenique</i> , Paris
<i>HN</i>	Pliny the Elder, <i>Historia Naturalis</i> (Natural History)
<i>Hom</i>	<i>Homer</i>
<i>Il</i>	<i>Iliad</i>
<i>JDAI</i>	<i>Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts</i> , Berlin, de Gruyter
<i>MEFR</i>	<i>Melanges d'Archologie et d'Histoire de l'École Français de Rome</i> , Paris, de Boccard
<i>Od</i>	<i>Odyssey</i>
<i>RE</i>	<i>Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altentumwissenschaft</i> , G. Wissowa et al. (eds), Stuttgart, 1893–
<i>TAPhS</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philosophical Society</i> , Philadelphia, Independence Square

Introduction

Ancient Voices is the first volume in a four-part series designed to offer views of collecting practices in Europe over the long term through the recorded voices of the collectors themselves and their contemporary commentators, where possible. *Ancient Voices* draws upon writings that relate to the accumulation of material objects from as early as British prehistory, perhaps around 1600 BC, through archaic Greece, through the classical and medieval centuries, to around AD 1500: in all a time-span of some three millennia, and a cultural span embracing prehistoric communities, the notion of the city-state, a world empire, Christian kingdoms and the earliest phases of what is usually called modern society. Such diversity requires discussion, and its inclusion within the collecting theme requires justification.

The point was made in the Preface that collecting is not a simple activity, and in that discussion were linked ideas about the operation of tradition and its relationship to 'Europe', all of which are particularly pertinent to *Ancient Voices* and need to be taken up here. Collecting can be described as both an accumulation of objects and an act of cosmological interpretation carried out in the practice of the accumulation. In this sense, therefore, every gathering of material goods is a collection, and in one sense carries the same weight of cultural significance. But in the complex world of actual historical human practice, this is not what we see. Certain kinds of accumulation are given cultural precedence within the given community and in broad terms, these kinds seem to embrace two characteristics. Firstly, they are of goods deemed precious, as a result of their rarity, the amount of social capital embodied within them through the technical or artistic effort and skill which they represent, and the quality of specialised or arcane knowledge which their 'proper' manipulation requires (or often, all of these). Secondly, in notions closely bound up with these allotted values, such accumulations are given a broad community and individual significance which sustains identity in its cosmological relationships.

This last point invites elaboration. 'Identity' depends upon an ability to discern a particular crux where time and space intersect, and to say 'we' are what this intersection is; the time-span involved is frequently considerable since the notion of 'us' is itself usually long term. The temporal-spatial crossing is then given a cosmological setting through the generation of cultural discussions which validate, reflect and encourage social practice and appropriate systems of understanding and legitimisation. A number of ways in which the collecting together of particular

objects has been a part of this creating and defining process in the European tradition offer themselves to view. Collecting forms part of affirming the significance of the mighty dead, as a memorialising activity, whether the accumulation remains open to view or hidden. It acts as a social symbol through which relationships can be created between person and person, person and community, and both of these and the divine. It can act as a form of sacrifice in which valuables are surrendered, and the sacred, particularly the sacred place, created. It can be a part of the poetic of good and evil, and it can construct systems of knowledge which inform and support social action. Implicated in all this are a range of sites – grave, temple, church, palace, study, museum – where practice takes place.

The phrase ‘the European tradition’ has just been used, and was discussed in the Preface. It should be said here that this emphatically does not involve any quasi-mystical belief in a ‘European spirit’ or any deterministic idea of the defining presence of ‘blood’, descent, genes or similar pseudo-scientific misinformation. What is meant is the simple proposition that successive generations draw on, and make use of, the experiences of their forebears, and that they do this in a number of ways. The most obvious of these ways is by actual transmission: later generations hear stories from the past, or read books written in the past. The most easily demonstrated way in which this has worked within Europe is that in which the people of the Roman empire read texts written originally in Greek several generations earlier, and were influenced by them; and the people of the fifteenth century AD and onwards read accounts by both the Greeks and the Romans, and were influenced by them. This chain constitutes a generally perceived tradition in collecting practice, and a very important one: it is the reason why classical texts are allotted a considerable space in this volume.

Equally important is the perceived relationship to a past where the line of any actual traceable contact through directly transmitted practices and texts is lacking. Eighteenth-century English gentlemen felt Homer to be important and to illumine emerging evidence of ancient practices in Britain, partly because of superficial similarities between text and appearance and partly because of a shaped mindset which made Homer the arbiter in such matters. These two aspects of significance are important in the long term of collecting practice.

The idea of continuity is, of course, crucial to our idea of the relationship of the present to the past. ‘Continuity’ is not at present a favoured way of perceiving the relationship between past and present, following upon the demonstration of the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) and the destruction, for example, of the cherished notion that aspects of ‘folk’ or popular culture have a continuity running back

into prehistory (Hutton, 1987). Manifestly, each generation makes its own use of sites, customs and ideas that have come to it from the past, and also creates quite new notions; manifestly, also, these older fragments are seen to pass something of their earlier form and content down the line. This is true of all social practice, and collecting is no exception.

It is to enhance understanding of more recent, say post-1500, practices that the decision was taken to include the volume *Ancient Voices* in this series and so allow testimony relating to the kinds of accumulations, and the themes which they represent, made by the generations who lived before the beginning of the early modern period, when European collecting as generally understood makes its appearance; although, of course, the debt of these practitioners to Greek and (especially) Roman predecessors was recognised by them, and has been ever since. Classical collecting drew, as Bounia has shown, on a context of the long term, in which notions of gathered grave goods, sacred treasures, gift exchange and the ethics of possession are very significant.

These social practices informed the archaic and early classical period in Greece, but were also, as far as we can see, likely to have been important in the corresponding pre-imperial Roman period in northern and central Europe. Prehistoric Britain shows us groups of grave goods, accumulations of valuables usually called 'hoards' and materially well-endowed sacred places. These continue to appear through the Roman period inside and outside the empire, and show up again in Germanic, and later Scandinavian, successor states. They are part and parcel of a complex relationship to the spread of Christian institutions, which we see gradually across western Europe, involving grave treasures in the shape of relics, and their richly decorated sites, treasure hoards and what the twentieth century would call 'art objects', all within a moral and social framework. Such palaces of God were easily appropriated as palaces of the ruler, when circumstances so suggested, as they did in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and offered a context within and against which the different collecting styles of the later sixteenth century could be constructed. Clearly, each generation, institution and individual acted in relation to a very large range of stimulations, and in one sense each accumulation is a unique event aimed at a particular combination of circumstances; but equally clearly, circumstances have similarity, and bear a perceived relationship to what has gone before.

The keen-eyed reader will note that the term 'accumulation' has been preferred over 'collection' in this last discussion. 'Collection' may be a protean notion best left to the subjective judgement of each self-styled 'collector', but it is not likely to have been the way in which prehistoric or medieval Christian communities thought of themselves. But if, as suggested earlier, the practice of collecting involves an act of accumula-

tion linked with an intention to assert a cosmological interpretation, and with the conscious selection of objects which are deemed capable of making these constructions, then groups of grave goods or accumulations of church silver do come within the scope. In a series of this kind, they are the essential prelude to what comes after.

Part 1, 'Voices from the distant past', is organised into two sections. The first, chronologically generally the earlier, presents accounts of the discovery of British prehistoric accumulations: grave goods from early Bronze Age barrows, metalwork from later Bronze Age hoards and accumulations from Iron Age sites. These are given, naturally, through the accounts of their modern finders, rather than the testimony of contemporaries, and they are of significance both as part of the succession of longer-term contexts just described, and as a stimulant to certain kinds of collecting in later modern times (see Volume 2, *Early Voices*).

The second section gives direct testimony from earlier Greek writers of gift-giving practices and cultural beliefs that initiated a series of notions which influenced object valuation and determined the consequent appreciation of object possession and accumulation. The gift exchange tradition as a means of creating and perpetuating social relations with the gods, nature or other humans, at an individual or communal level, gave material culture a prominent role as the bearer of moral value and as a medium of legitimisation and concretisation of events and relations. Following this line of thought, this section of Part 1 consists of paragraphs from ancient sources focusing on the role of material culture in the creation of the social interaction between men (Homer, *Odyssey*) and men and the gods (Herodotus, *Histories*), and illustrates in the most direct manner both the long-term perspective of the collecting practice and discourse, and the roots of the values attributed to material culture in subsequent generations. At the heart of these ideas lie the genealogies attached to valued objects (Homer, *Iliad*), the association of the particular skills required to produce those precious items with divine or supernatural power (Diodoros; Homer, *Iliad*, *Odyssey*), and the idea that wealth is immediately related to the accumulation of artefacts bearing certain moral and symbolic qualities, and their removal from the world of commodities into a different sphere, that of the mythic *thalamos* (meaning equally a treasury and a tomb) or sanctuary (Herodotus, *Histories*; Homer, *Odyssey*).

'Greek voices' (Part 2) brings together material from Greek and Roman authors which bears witness to the role and importance of material culture and its accumulation, as well as to the intellectual notions and the practices that relate to it in the Greek world. Material culture was linked to notions of evidence and truth, and thus was related to antiquarianism, the inherent interest in the past, which takes shape in the systematic

assemblage of artefacts, information and anything else that can bring people closer to the past, to history, but also to accumulated knowledge. In other words, the prestigious genealogy and inalienability of the gift exchange tradition, as parameters that determined the valuation of material culture, were enhanced with the addition of an active interest in the idea and practice of 'archaeology', that is, in a kind of history that relied on material specimens and recognised their role as evidence and proof. The accumulation of relics of the mighty dead, that will find its culmination in the Christian tradition, is at the crossroad of these two notions and expresses the same need for objects to be understood as symbols and reminders of events, personalities and specific actions, as well as sacred talismans that would shape and protect individual and communal identity (Herodotus, *Histories*; Plutarch, *Life of Theseus*). Objects brought from 'outside', or the past, had also an active role to play as transmitters of rites of passage and markers of important events, as well as media through which a transference to a different time and place could be achieved.

The role and importance of the ancient public collections held in sanctuaries is also presented through a selection of sources. Pausanias' *Description of Greece*, Herodas' fourth *Mime*, and also contemporary researchers' work, like that by D. Harris (1995), describe accumulations of artefacts in ancient 'museums'. In the context of the previously presented sources, it becomes obvious that these 'museums' have more than their functional similarity as repositories of artefacts to recommend them as being worthy of a title that refers to contemporary institutions, and that the assemblages of material culture in sanctuaries did more for the definition of notions of sacred and communal than is obvious at first glance. The public practice of collecting is also discussed in the paragraphs that describe the treasuries (Pausanias, *Description of Greece*); these have to be understood as a social, historical and political transformation of the *thalamos* of the Homeric epics, which was endowed with mythical value, and as a physical expression of the idea of the city-state, very much in the spirit of the public museums of the centuries to come.

A selection of ancient sources regarding collecting practice in the classical world would be incomplete without reference to the Alexandrian Museum, which can clarify the character and origin of the institution, illuminate the perception of the museum in subsequent periods and underline the interdependence between philosophical discourse and collecting practice (Strabo, *Geography*; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*).

Finally, paragraphs from Plutarch's *Life of Aratus* and Pliny's *Natural History* describe Hellenistic collectors through the eyes of Roman citizens: Aratus of Sicyon and Attalus of Pergamum were the first individual collectors to be recognised as such; through their portraits presented in

Roman sources we realise the mechanisms of transmission, since these were based on contemporary written Hellenistic accounts that the Roman writers used as sources, in more or less the same way we use theirs, in order to create models for themselves and their contemporaries as well as for the generations to follow.

'Roman voices' (Part 3) continues the classical theme. It brings together testimonies relating to collecting practice in the Roman world and includes the first surviving direct communications of a collector. Cicero, in his private correspondence to his friends and agents T. Pomponius Atticus and M. Fabius Gallus, voices a rational Roman collector's views on the collecting practice and discourse of his era (Cicero, *ad Atticum*; *ad Familiares*). The portrait of other collectors, real or literary, like Asinius Polio, Augustus, Verres, Trimalchio and Euctus, are also drawn in the texts of their contemporaries and they serve to illustrate both the appropriation of Greek material culture and collecting notions of the past into Roman collections, and the psychology of the collector as this was perceived by his contemporaries (Petronius, *Satyricon*; Pliny, *Natural History*; Suetonius, *Augustus*; Cicero, *Verrine Orations*; and Martial, *Epigrams*). Passion for artefacts that often reached irrationality and madness – fetishism – but also the acquaintance with Greek art and the development of art theory and criticism, defined the collecting practice (Plutarch, *Aemilius Paullus*; Livy; Quintilian, *Institution Oratoria*; Martial, *Epigrams*; and Pliny, *Natural History*).

Ancient sources are also particularly explicit in their discussion of the collecting institutions of the Roman world – the mechanisms of the art market with its agents, antiquarians, fakers and the exaggerated prices; the sites of display for the assemblages, in the public or the private domain; art tourism and the first appearances of the official terminology regarding the care of collections; these are presented through a selection of texts (Martial, *Epigrams*; Cicero, *Verrine Orations*; Pliny, *Natural History*; Philostratus, *Imagines*; Josephus, *Jewish War*; Suetonius, *Vitellius*; and Pausanias, *Description of Greece*).

Part 3 is completed with reference to women who had developed an interest in the accumulation of artefacts (Martial, *Epigrams*). In addition, the influence Roman collections had on subsequent generations is highlighted through a few references regarding a broader definition of collecting to include 'textual' collections, as well as a special mention of Pliny whose role as a major source for the collectors of subsequent periods and as an archetype collector cannot be overstressed. The themes in these two parts are treated at a length commensurate with their importance both at the time and to later readers of the works.

'Early medieval voices' (Part 4), concentrates upon testimonies about collecting practice from the fourth century to around 1150. The mingling

of both themes is explicit in the account of the discoveries of fourth-century silverware, the kind of part cult service, part prestige gathering which falls within the broader remit of the collecting theme. The theme is pursued in the material relating to the relic collections in Britain and in Constantinople, and in the art object production and accumulation at the Abbey of St Denis, Paris. The pieces from Anglo-Saxon poetry, *The Ruin* and *Beowulf*, show the significant pleasure taken in treasure simultaneously for its own sake and for the social bonding which it represents; and *Beowulf* gives us accounts of treasure hoards buried in graves, the treasure guarded by the dragon, and that taken with Beowulf to his own barrow. The same themes are picked up in the *Nibelungsaga* and in the *Lay of Angantyr* where, in particular, the focus on the magic sword Tyrfinn gives in intense poetic form an idea of the fetishistic power accorded to particular objects. The piece from *The Dream of Maxen Wledig* is included to represent the contemporary world of Celtic material imagination, temperamentally not too dissimilar from that of the Germanic world. The excerpt from Master Gregory's description of his visit to Rome (see Chapter 63) gives testimony to the link which, throughout these centuries and their mixed culture, contemporaries never ceased to feel between themselves and the material remains of the classical world.

High medieval voices up to 1500 are pursued in Part 5. The theme of collecting material from the ancient world runs through many of these pieces, beginning with that describing the activities of Henry of Blois and continuing with the pieces relating to the collecting activities of the Medicis, Cosimo, Piero and Lorenzo. A complementary group of pieces describes the treasure accumulations of contemporary northern Europe through the excerpt from the *Nibelungenlied*, which carries the account of the great treasure into its later manifestation, and those from Canterbury, Exeter and in the possession of William of Wykham, Bishop of Winchester. *Pearl* shows the psychological and symbolic significance of the material, and the text from around 1200 shows the craftsmanship which was involved.

In an almost uncanny way, the cultural multiplicity of these themes are fused into a consistent view, and a consistent collecting practice, in Suger's autobiographical account of his activities at the royal French Abbey of St Denis, Paris (which, as we show in Part 4, was a major art producer in the earlier medieval period). Suger quite consciously looked back to the cosmological aesthetic of the late classical world for his inspiration and as a result gathered gem-studded gold-work to enhance the relics of his church and its altars and ceremonies, cherished antiquities like Dagobert's throne, and hardstone vessels from the ancient classical world. Here at one specific time and site, we can see the themes already mentioned in action through collecting practice. Suger collects to

enhance the metaphorical presence of the mighty dead represented by their bones; his accumulation creates relationships between God, the abbey and the feudal lords who presented material, which renders time, place and content sacred; and it constructs a poetic of material knowledge.

We may not be taking too great a liberty if we suppose that in his abbey, his deliberate accumulation of particular riches, and his supporting mystical material philosophy, Suger speaks not just for himself but for his own and succeeding generations. These generations perhaps included the Medici and those elsewhere in Europe who modelled their collecting activities upon them. When we read of Piero looking 'at his jewels and precious stones, of which he has a marvellous quantity of great value, some engraved in various ways, some not. He takes great pleasure and delight in looking at those, and in discussing their various powers and excellencies', we do not seem to be so far from Suger's 'Thus when – out of my delight in the beauty of the House of God – the loveliness of the many-coloured gems has called me away from external cares.' And both remind us of the *Ruin* poet's warriors who 'gazed on wrought gemstones, on gold, on silver, on wealth held and hoarded, on light-filled amber', and of the Roman passion for murrhine crystal vessels, described by Pliny.

The parts have been divided between the two contributors. Bounia was responsible for the Greek material in Part 1, and for Parts 2 and 3; Pearce for the British material in Part 1 and for Parts 4 and 5. This Introduction is a joint production. The arrangement of bibliographical references has given us much thought. Eventually, it was decided to give references to ancient Greek and Latin authors by chapter and line in their own works at the head of each excerpt, following normal usage, and to give the reference to the edition in the section headed 'Source'. Elsewhere, reference in the 'Source' is made by publication and page number. In general, in earlier English texts, spelling and grammar have been left as in the original, but occasionally, for the sake of clarity, some small amendments have been made.

Susan Pearce and Alexandra Bounia

Part I
Voices from the Distant Past

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British Bronze Age burial mounds discussed by Richard Colt Hoare, William Borlase and Edward Cunnington

The prehistoric burial mounds – mostly Bronze Age – in Britain began to be of interest to educated men from the middle decades of the eighteenth century. The framework of interpretation brought to their excavation is made clear in the musings of Sir William Borlase, published in 1769. Explicit reference is made to Homer through classical stories about Alexander of Macedon and to the ‘Druids’, a favourite piece of eighteenth-century antiquarian fantasy also with its roots in the classical writers (Piggott, 1968).

Colt Hoare’s account is the primary record of the discovery of the richest Bronze Age burial mound so far found (or perhaps likely to be found) in Britain, called the ‘Bush Barrow’ because it had a prominent bush growing out of its mound. Bush Barrow is one component of a group of some twenty-five Bronze Age barrows erected around 1600 bc and Neolithic mortuary structures built around a thousand years earlier; Stonehenge is about 700 metres away to the north. The whole complex represents one of the most important ritual centres in early prehistoric Britain.

Bush Barrow is an earth mound about 3 metres high, which originally covered the body of a male burial clothed, with a lozenge-shaped plate of sheet gold on his chest, gold belt fittings, and three bronze daggers all in wooden, leather-lined sheaths and one with a handle decorated with thousands of tiny gold pins. There was also a bronze axe-head and what has usually been interpreted as a mace-of-office, comprising a stone mace-head and a wooden shaft fitted with bone rings.

Sir Richard Colt Hoare (1758–1838), the son of a wealthy banker, was interested in classical studies and a connoisseur of the arts, and also strongly affected by the Romantic sympathies of his generation which drew him to travel the more rugged parts of Wales. In 1803 he formed a partnership with William Cunnington (1754–1810), a local wool merchant, which was to see the exploration of many Wiltshire archaeological sites and the production of a history of Wiltshire based on their joint researches. The Introduction to the first volume, published in 1810, proclaimed: ‘We speak from facts, not theory’, a novel notion for the day. The

pair opened some 465 barrows altogether, not all of which produced grave goods.

William Borlase (1695–1772) was the prime antiquary of Cornwall. He was a clergyman who clashed with John Wesley in 1744 and 1745, and corresponded with men like Alexander Pope. He published *Cornish Antiquities* in 1754 and *Antiquities of Cornwall* in 1769.

Edward Cunnington, William's grandson, continued the excavating tradition in Dorset in the 1880s, and in 1882 he opened the Clandon Barrow, on the north-western end of the chalk ridge crowned with the multi-period earthworks of Hod Hill and Maiden Castle. The discoveries included a grave group comprising ceramics, a lozenge-shaped gold plate, a shale mace-head with gold studs, a cup carved from a lump of amber, and a dagger. Bush Barrow and Clandon Barrow are members of a well-recognised complex of barrows which contained rich grave goods all broadly of the same kind, notably sheet-gold ornaments, bronze daggers, amber beads often made up into elaborate necklaces, beads and cups made of carved shale from Kimmeridge, Dorset, faience (blue-glazed pottery) beads probably from Mycenaean Greece and a range of ceramics. Such barrows are concentrated on the southern British chalklands of Wiltshire and Dorset, but they also occur in east Devon, Cornwall, Sussex and East Anglia.

The interpretation of these barrows, together with their grave goods and their contemporary environs over the last two centuries, has informed and exemplified the development of archaeological thinking. In a classic paper of 1938 Stuart Piggot defined them as the critical component of his Wessex culture, and so as the burial mounds of kings who controlled the lucrative trade in gold, amber, tin and faience which linked Ireland, Cornwall, the Baltic coasts (sources of amber) and Greece. More recently, archaeological interest has concentrated upon the implications of such 'high status' burials for local patterns of dominance, land control and the social mechanisms of exchange.

However, the idea of the great chief buried with his collected wealth as an appropriate social expression of communal deposition has proved powerful and long enduring. It is seen as a fundamental expression of accumulation, both in the reality of Bronze Age Europe and in how it has been interpreted since the eighteenth century.

SIR RICHARD COLT HOARE

This tumulus was formerly fenced round and planted with trees and its exterior at present bears a very rough appearance from being covered

with furze and heath. The first attempts made by Mr Cunningham on this barrow proved unsuccessful, as also those of some farmers, who tried their skill digging into it.

Our researches were renewed in September 1808 and we were amply repaid for our perseverance and former disappointment. On reaching the floor of the barrow, we discovered the skeleton of a stout and tall man lying from south to north: the extreme length of his thigh was 20 inches. About 18 inches south of the head, we found several brass rivets¹ intermixed with wood, and some thin bits of brass nearly decomposed. These articles covered a space of 12 inches or more; it is probable, therefore, that they were the mouldered remains of a shield.

Near the shoulders lay a fine axe, the lower end of which owes its great preservation to having been originally inserted within a handle of wood. Near the right arm was a dagger of brass and a spearhead of the same metal, full thirteen inches long and the largest we have ever found, though not so neat in its pattern as some others of an inferior size which have been engraved in our work. These were accompanied by a curious article of gold, which I conceive, had originally decorated the case of the dagger. The handle of wood belonging to this instrument exceeds anything we have yet seen, both in design and execution, and could not be surpassed (if indeed equalled) by the most noble workman of modern times. The viewer will immediately recognise the British zigzag, or the modern Vandyke pattern, which was formed with a labour and exactness almost unaccountable by thousands of gold rivets, smaller than the smallest pin.

The head of the handle, though exhibiting a variety of pattern, was also found by the same kind of studdings. So very minute indeed were these pins that our labourers had thrown thousands of them out with their shovel and scattered them in every direction, before, with the necessary aid of a magnifying glass we could discover what they were; but fortunately enough remained attached to the wood to enable us to decipher the pattern. Beneath the fingers of the right hand lay a lance-head of brass, but so much corroded that it broke in pieces on moving. Immediately over the breast of the skeleton was a large plate of gold in the form of a lozenge and measuring 7 inches by 6. It was fixed to a thin piece of wood, over the edges of which the gold was tapped: it is perforated at top and bottom, for the purpose, probably, of fastening it to the dress in a breast-plate. The even surface of this noble ornament is relieved by indented lines, cheques, or zigzags, following the shape of the outline, and forming lozenge within lozenge, diminishing gradually towards the centre. We next discovered on the right side of the skeleton, a very curious perforated stone, some wrought articles of bone, many small rings of the same material and another article of gold. The stone is made

out of a fossil mass of tubulana, and polished; rather of an egg form, or as a farrier who was present observed, resembling the top of a large gimlet. It had a wooden handle, which was fixed into the perforations in the centre, and encircled by a neat ornament of brass, part of which still adheres to the stone. As this stone bears no marks of wear or attrition, I can hardly consider it to have been used as a domestic implement, and from the circumstances of its being composed of a mass of sea worms, or little serpents, I think we may not be too fanciful in considering it an article of consequence. We know, by history, that much importance was attached by the ancients to the serpent and I have before had occasion to mention the veneration with which the *glain hadroeth* was esteemed by the Britons; and my classical readers will recollect the fanciful story related by Pliny on this subject, who says that the Druid's Egg was formed by the scum of a vast multitude of serpents twisted and conjoined up together. This stone, therefore, which contains a mass of serpularia or little serpents, might have been held in great veneration by the Britons who it considered of sufficient importance to merit a place amongst the many rich and valuable relics deposited in this tumulus with the body of the deceased.

Source

Bush Barrow: The Ancient History of Wiltshire, Sir Richard Colt Hoare, Vol. 1 (1812), 203–4

SIR WILLIAM BORLASE

By the contents of all Barrows which have been examined elsewhere as well as in this island, it appears that the principal cause of their erection was to enclose either the Ashes, or the Bodies (unburnt), of the dead: however, the Sepulchres of the Ancients being always looked upon with a kind of veneration, they became afterwards applied to the solemnization of their highest Rites of Religion and Festivity. No sooner was Alexander arrived upon the Plains before Troy, but he performed Sacrifices and other usual Rites at the *Tumulus* of Achilles; and this is recorded of him not as any thing new, or instituted by him; we are therefore only to consider him here, as complying with the already established customs of his country. Again, as the Druids burnt, and afterwards buried their dead, there is no doubt but they had Barrows for their Sepulchres as well as other nations, and this was the original use of them, but they were afterwards otherwise applied; for, on the Stone Barrows, the Druids

kindled their annual fires, especially where there is a large flat Stone on the top. Where the Earth-Barrows are inclosed, or shaped by a Circle of Stone erect, they may safely be presumed to have served at Alters for Sacrifice. These Heaps were also, probably, at times, places of Inauguration, the Chieftain elect standing on the top exposed to view, and the Druid officiating close to the edge below. On the same Hillocks (likely) judgement was frequently pronounced, and the most important decisions made, as from a sacred eminence; and where these were not at hand, something of like kind was erected, for the Judge to stand or sit upon, and give forth his Decrees with proper advantage.

Source

Borlase, Sir W., *Antiquities of Cornwall*, 1769: 222

EDWARD CUNNINGTON'S NARRATIVE RELATING TO THE CLANDON BARROW

This remarkably fine barrow² is situated on a commanding position on a ridge of sand, gravel and clay, capping the chalk at the eastern end of Martinstown, and about a quarter of a mile west of Maiden Castle (actually it is half a mile north west of the extreme defences of the prehistoric hill town). It is a handsome cone, with very steep sides and forms a prominent object for miles around. The diameter is 68 feet, height of centre 18½ feet. It is composed entirely of layers – put in with some regularity – of the sands, clay and gravel ...

At a further depth of four feet under the above interments³ – or seven feet from the surface – a cairn of flints was found of nine inches to a foot in thickness and eight feet in diameter. Almost on the edge of the south side of this, and on the flints, was a bronze dagger ... which was unfortunately broken; this had been left in its wooden sheath, small fragments of which were visible, and also a small bronze ring attached to it for attachment ...

On top of the cairn and pressing close to a flint, the form of which it had partly taken, was a fine diamond-shaped ornament of thin beaten gold ... the greater diameter six inches, the lesser 4½ inches ...

Near to the piece of gold, and also upon the flints, was a handsome jet⁴ ornament that may have been the head of a sceptre. At its base is a cocket with marks round showing where a handle had been fixed. The shape is elliptical, the sides being slightly flattened, with two gold bosses on each, and another boss on the top. These bosses are ⅝th of an inch diameter, and

fitted accurately into sockets. The length of this unique object is three inches, two inches broad and an inch and a half in thickness ...

Scattered amongst the flints and spread over a surface of two feet were the fragments of an amber cup ...

Below the cairn – which rested on a bed of fine white clay, were the broken pieces of an incense cup of dark brown pottery ... This cup had been broken and the parts scattered on the clay, before the flints were placed there.

At six feet from the centre surface and a foot from the flints, a badly baked urn was found. It was crushed perfectly flat upon a thin stratum of ashes and small flints ... It was finely ornamented.

There were several bands of black ashes throughout the barrow, sometimes mixed with worked flints; a good thumb scraper was found at ten feet depth.

Source

‘Clandon Barrow’ Edward Cunnington’s manuscript in Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, published in part in Drew, C.D., ‘Two Bronze Age Barrows’, *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* 58, 1937: 18–25

Notes

- 1 The grave goods are in Devizes Museum, Wiltshire. All the non-gold work is bronze, not brass.
- 2 The grave goods are in Dorset Museum, Dorchester, Dorset. It should be noted that any actual burial associated with these finds was not located.
- 3 Above the rich early Bronze Age burial, later burials had been inserted into the mound – a Bronze Age cremation in a funerary urn, and two inhumations in stone-lined graves, possibly Roman.
- 4 In fact, Kimmeridge shale, not jet.

References

Annable and Simpson, 1964
 Grinsell, 1959
 Marsdon, 1974
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 Piggot, 1938
 Piggot, 1968