

Reading *versus* Seeing? Winckelmann's Excerpting Practice and the Genealogy of Art History**

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Summary: From his arrival in Italy in 1755, Winckelmann's work is infused throughout by a fundamental antinomy: reading *versus* seeing. This antinomy possesses for him a decidedly epistemological significance: it allows him to present himself as the father of a discipline deserving of its name, i.e., the history of art. In *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764), he claims to break with a long tradition of art discourse which had been primarily supported by ancient *texts*, basing his book instead on the direct *observation* of the artworks. The aim of this paper is to critically examine this antinomy. How does seeing relate to reading in his working method? What relationship does art history, in the empirical dimension Winckelmann wanted to give it, have to book knowledge? Winckelmann's excerpts collection provides valuable answers to these questions. Following an old scholarly tradition, Winckelmann used to write down passages of his readings, constituting a vast handwritten library of excerpts which never left him. The result of this intense excerpting practice consists in some 7,500

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** In this paper, the chapters "Seeing versus Reading: Some Insights in the History of an Antinomy in Winckelmann's Works", "The Development of Winckelmann's Practice of Excerpting from the German to the Roman Phase" and "A Socially Determined Practice?" provide an updated English version of texts already published in Décultot 2003 (French original) and Décultot 2014c (German translation). The sections surrounding these three chapters, namely the introduction as well as the chapters "Deconstructing an Antinomy" and "Final Remarks" are new. This composition directly reflects the evolution of my own work on excerpting in modern times. The historical description of Winckelmann's excerpting activity between Germany and Italy—already published in the previously mentioned chapters—is based on older research, first partly presented in Décultot 2000, 9–78 (German translation: Décultot 2004, 11–52) on the genealogy of Winckelmann's art history, whose results are still valid. But one question remained unanswered in these previous publications: for what epistemological reasons did Winckelmann, who tended to criticize scholars and book knowledge in general, continue to engage in excerpting so intensively and to refrain from any strong criticism of this activity when he was in Italy and harbored the ambition to write an art history based not on texts, but on the direct observation of the artworks themselves? In order to answer this question, I more recently tried to analyze Winckelmann's singular excerpting activity in the light of a long history of excerpting practices in modern times. It is this research that feeds the new chapters of this article.

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pages, which allow to better define the share of empirical observation and book-based knowledge in his approach to ancient art.

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1. Introduction

The technique of excerpting—in other words, of extracting elements from a text while or after reading—has been known since antiquity.¹ With the beginning of the modern period, and especially with the increased prevalence of the printing press, this practice enjoyed particular popularity in the scholarly world. In times of expanding print production, excerpt collections served as personal manuscript substitutes for extensive book collections.² On a longer time scale, collections of excerpts fulfill two central functions: they serve as stores of selected readings and observations, but also as reservoirs of materials (information, words, tropes, etc.) which could be reused for other textual or more broadly intellectual productions. In this way, excerpt collections form an important hinge between central facets of intellectual activity which, in modern times, were increasingly considered to be different, separate or even antagonistic. In terms of textual genetics, they provide an insight into the process that leads from reading to writing, from the note-taking activity of the excerpter to the production of his “own” or “new” writings. With regard to this textual-genetic dimension, excerpt collections especially highlight the complexity of some fundamental concepts of textual understanding in the modern era, such as original and copy, source and derivate, which can, on the basis of these documents, no longer be perceived as opposite to or even as simply distinct from each other.

In cognitive terms, these excerpt collections provide an instructive glimpse of the relationship between knowledge acquisition and knowledge production. In particular, they allow us to analyze the complex relationship between book-based and object-based knowledge. In the academic world of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, excerpt collecting was not only widespread in disciplines that primarily relied on books and written sources, but also in scholarly fields which claimed to rely on experimental methods, such as natural history, or on the empirical study of objects, like art history.³ This broad scope of application corresponds with the semantic amplitude of the notion of excerpting. Excerpt collections not only comprised of reading notes but also of observations, i.e., of notes on things which had been thought or seen.⁴ In this regard, excerpt collections of the Early Modern period, especially collections cultivated by naturalists or art historians, are able to shed a particular light on the relationship between the frameworks of experimental thinking on one hand and book-related knowledge on the

¹ For more on the history of excerpting in antiquity, see: Dorandi 2016; Dusil et al. 2017; Morlet 2015.

² See esp. Blair 2010, on 62–116, 173–229.

³ Décultot 2000 (German translation: Décultot 2004); Krämer 2014; Krämer 2016; Yeo 2014.

⁴ Zedelmaier 2015, on 58; see also *infra* chapter “Deconstructing an Antinomy”.

other, and thereby contribute—in the wave of important works of the last decades⁵—to a historiographical revision of the empiricist paradigm which still shapes our understanding of the age of “scientific revolution.”

Finally, in terms of knowledge sociology, the study of excerpt collections makes it possible to approach and better understand one of the central transformations in the Early Modern intellectual field: the (real and/or constructed) differentiation between the scholarly and “literary” sphere with regard to reading and writing habits.⁶ It allows us to analyze whether the growing differentiation between erudition and literature—which can be observed to varying degrees throughout Europe in the modern period—is also reflected in reading and writing practices. More specifically, it provides new insights into some key aspects of scholarly or literary practices, like the treatment and presentation of sources (by means of footnotes, for example), which reflects important changes in how authorship was conceived, represented and perceived.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the role that excerpting played in the work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), who is generally considered to be the father of modern art history. The first reason for this chronological focus on an eighteenth-century scholar lies in a research deficit. Although the technique of excerpting constitutes a significant field of the history of fifteenth- to seventeenth-century scholarship,⁷ only little attention has been afforded to the eighteenth century and the period thereafter. This lack of interest has deep origins which are closely related to “eighteenth-century self-fashioning,” in other words, to the image which significant eighteenth-century protagonists shaped of their own epoch. With the Enlightenment, excerpting became the target of increasing criticism: many eighteenth-century writers and scholars distanced themselves from a practice which was deemed to be the cause of subordinate thinking and epigonic writing.⁸

Researchers in the field of the late modern period have largely followed this stylization and ignored the survival of excerpting practices in and from the Age of Enlightenment. However, numerous documents—including manuscripts by Montesquieu, Jean-Paul, Nietzsche and even Winckelmann—show that excerpting remained a widespread and intense practice in eighteenth-century Europe and in the following period, and particularly in the private studies of authors who publicly criticized this method zealously.⁹ The eighteenth century is therefore not characterized by the extinction of this practice but by an increasing discrepancy between a still intensive activity of excerpting in the private sphere and a public discourse on scholarly habits, which either criticized this practice or no longer evoked it at all.

In this regard, the eighteenth century exemplifies in a particularly suggestive way both the difficulty and strong potential of excerpt collections for research. During the entire modern period, the practice of excerpting presents a double di-

⁵ See esp.: Daston and Park 2006; Daston 2010.

⁶ Bourdieu 1992; Viala 1985.

⁷ Blair 2010; Cevoloni 2006; Cevoloni 2016; Chatelain 1997; Goyet 1996; Grafton 2014; Moss 1996; Zedelmaier 2015, on 45–61.

⁸ Décultot 2014b; Mayer 1999, on 23–103.

⁹ Volpillac-Auger 2014; Müller 1988; Will 2013.

mension. On the one hand, it was a private, personal, subject-related activity, shaped by the idiosyncrasy of a particular reader and reflecting his intellectual personality. On the other hand, it was the result of a socially and institutionally highly codified procedure, learned at school and university, and therefore the product of a system which exceeded and determined individual reading habits. It is possible to trace the history of a particular reader's excerpt collection and to find within it a key to understanding his work. It is also possible to consider the history of this technique as one that is taught and practiced by a group. The challenge is to connect these two dimensions, especially in a period like the eighteenth century, in which this practice seemed to disappear from the public sphere and to be no longer cultivated except in the secrecy of one's private study.

To meet this challenge, this paper attempts to analyze how Winckelmann's excerpting activity informs the epistemological frame—i.e., the theoretical foundation and the method—of his art-historical work, and to determine to what extent this activity is indebted to a vivid scholarly tradition shaped by strong social and institutional patterns. By doing so, it intends to account for the central epistemological significance of excerpt collections in the late modern period.

2. Seeing *versus* Reading: Some Insights in the History of an Antinomy in Winckelmann's Works

From his preliminary research for *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764) to his *Monumenti antichi inediti* (1767), Johann Joachim Winckelmann's work is infused throughout by a fundamental antinomy: reading *versus* seeing. "Ich kam nach Rom, nur um zu sehen,"¹⁰ Winckelmann explained shortly after arriving in Italy in 1756. In Italy he regretted that he had written his first treatise, *Gedancken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke* (1755), in Germany before visually experiencing the works of Roman antiquity described therein: "Ich habe erfahren, daß man halbsehend von Alterthümern spricht aus Büchern, ohne selbst gesehen zu haben; ja, ich habe verschiedene Fehler eingesehen, welche ich begangen habe."¹¹ The artworks he saw in Rome seemed to have opened his eyes to a source of knowledge which he would praise henceforth as more certain and fruitful than all books. Textual criticism and the observation of sculpted forms, the intellectual process of reading and the sensitive process of seeing are thematically pitted against each other in all of his writings of the Italian period.

Winckelmann had multiple reasons for emphasizing this dichotomy. For one, it allowed him to claim a specific position in the academic world for himself, setting him apart from the scholarly tradition which he accused of drawing its knowledge only from the books. His favorite targets in this strategy were the *anti-*

¹⁰ Johann Joachim Winckelmann [to Christian Wilhelm Ernst Dietrich?], 1 June 1756, in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 1, on 226 (translation: "I came to Rome only so that I may see"). English translations are by ED, unless otherwise attributed.

¹¹ J. J. Winckelmann to Johann Michael Francke, 7 December 1755, in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 1, on 191 (translation: "I have learned that people talk half-blind about ancient works from books without having personally seen them; yes, I have discovered various errors I have made myself."). For this dichotomy of reading and seeing see also: J. J. Winckelmann to Konrad Friedrich Uden, 1 June 1756, in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 1, on 224; J. J. Winckelmann to Philipp von Stosch, beginning of June 1756, in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 1, on 227.

quarii, a group of scholars against whom he polemicized his entire life with rhetorical zeal. For example, Winckelmann asserts that the French antiquarian Bernard de Montfaucon (1655–1741)—who had in fact spent three years in Rome from 1698 to 1701—“compiled his work on the treasures of ancient art [*Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, 1719] from afar,” on the basis of second-hand engravings and illustrations which led him “into great error.”¹² “Man muß wissen, daß dieser Pater, wie sonst, also auch hier, als ein Franzose flüchtig gegangen ist. Seine *Antiquité expliquée* strotzet von erschrecklichen Vergehungen.”¹³ His attacks on his contemporaries were no less searing. Lessing, he writes, dared to comment on ancient sculpture although he “had seen Italy [...] only in his dreams.”¹⁴ The author of *Laocoön* has to come to Rome,¹⁵ for it is “difficult, if not impossible, for someone not resident in Rome to write anything substantial about ancient art or obscure antiquities.”¹⁶ His appeals for first-hand investigation often contain Biblical references. “Come and see,” he urges his readers in a hardly mistakable allusion to the Gospel of St. John (1, 47).¹⁷

For Winckelmann, these polemical feuds possessed a decidedly epistemological significance too. They allowed him to present himself as the father of a discipline deserving of its name, i.e., the history of art.

Es sind einige Schriften unter dem Namen einer Geschichte der Kunst an das Licht getreten; aber die Kunst hat einen geringen Antheil an denselben: denn ihre Verfasser haben sich mit derselben nicht genug bekannt gemacht, und konnten also nichts geben, als was sie aus Büchern, oder von sagen hören, hatten,

he writes in his preface to *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*.¹⁸ Winckelmann claims to break with a long tradition of discourse on art which had been—according to him—primarily supported by ancient texts, in other words, by the *written* legacy of antiquity, basing his *Geschichte der Kunst* instead on the direct, “autopti-

¹² Winckelmann 2006, on 73 (original: “Montfaucon hat sein Werk entfernt von den Schätzen der alten Kunst zusammengetragen, und hat mit fremden Augen, und nach Kupfern und Zeichnungen geurtheilet, die ihn zu großen Vergehungen verleitet haben.” Winckelmann 2002, on XV [1st edn.]).

¹³ J. J. Winckelmann to J. M. Francke, [9] March 1757, in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 1, on 275 (translation: “One should know that this friar here as well as in other places proceeded as a Frenchman carelessly. His *Antiquité expliquée* abounds with shocking errors.”). Winckelmann must have known that Montfaucon had spent three years in Rome and that his visual knowledge of Roman antiquities was not so limited, since Montfaucon 1719, vol. 1, on 1 explicitly and emphatically remarks on this in the preface to *Antiquité expliquée*.

¹⁴ J. J. Winckelmann to F. J. Goessel, 6 August 1766, in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 3, on 195: “Italien aber hat derselbe [Lessing] nur im Traume [...] gesehen”.

¹⁵ J. J. Winckelmann to J. M. Francke, 10 September 1766, in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 3, on 204: “Er [Lessing] komme nach Rom”.

¹⁶ Winckelmann 2006, on 75 (original: “Es ist daher schwer, ja fast unmöglich, etwas gründliches von der alten Kunst, und von nicht bekannten Alterthümern, außer Rom zu schreiben”; Winckelmann 2002, on XX [1st edn.]).

¹⁷ Winckelmann 1968, on 8: “Komm und siehe”.

¹⁸ Winckelmann 2002, on X (translation: “Some writings with the title *History of Art* appeared, but art has played only a negligible part in them. Their authors were insufficiently conversant with art and could communicate only what they had gleaned from books of hearsay.” Winckelmann 2006, on 73).

cal” observation of the artworks themselves. In this respect, Winckelmann saw himself as the founder of a far-reaching scientific revolution which would transform the knowledge of art from the hermeneutics of reading to one of seeing.

The great majority of Winckelmann’s readers concurred with this self-description. In his famous Winckelmann portrayal of 1805, Goethe presents the scholar as one who was extremely gifted in seeing, a man who “inspected, observed everything,” and thereby traversed the immense distances separating the world of books from the physical “works of wonder” (“Wunderwerken”).¹⁹ In the history of classical studies, this portrayal of Winckelmann was broadly accepted in the nineteenth century despite the fact that prominent figures in the field, such as Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812), wasted no time to point out the many deficits and errors in his interpretations.²⁰ Yet hardly anyone disparaged the epistemological significance of his method. Both the art historian Carl Justi (1832–1912) and the historian of the archeology Karl Bernhard Stark (1824–1879), to name just two, referred to Winckelmann as the inventor of an approach of ancient art which subscribed to stringent empirical principles and decisively rejected the model of predominantly text-based antiquarian expertise—an assessment which remains largely shared in numerous subject-relevant historical studies.²¹

But how does seeing relate to reading in Winckelmann’s working method and works? More precisely, what relationship does art history, in the empirical dimension Winckelmann wanted to give it, have to book knowledge? And what epistemological role does the excerpting activity play in this constellation?

3. The Development of Winckelmann’s Practice of Excerpting from the German to the Roman Phase

Winckelmann’s excerpts collection provides valuable answers to these questions. Following an old scholarly tradition, Winckelmann used to write down passages from his readings, constituting a vast handwritten library of excerpts, which never left him from his youth to his death. The result of this intense excerpting practice consists in some 7,500 pages, organized in booklets (Winckelmann called them “Hefte”) and preserved for the most part since 1801 in the National Library in Paris, and, for a minor part, in some other libraries in France, Italy and Germany.²² This collection of excerpts sheds light on two major aspects of Winckelmann’s scholarly practice: his reading and his writing activity. It allows us in par-

¹⁹ Goethe 1989, on 360: “Er [Winckelmann] beschaut, er betrachtet alles”.

²⁰ Heyne 1963, on 24.

²¹ Justi 1956, vol. 3, on 132–133. Justi proposed this interpretation already in 1866 in the following article: Justi 1866, on 136–137; see Stark 1880, on 193–208. For more on this image of Winckelmann, see, e.g., Schiering 1969, esp. 20–22.

²² Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (=BnF), Département des manuscrits (=Dpt. Mss.), Fonds allemand, vols. 56–76; Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek (=SU), Cod. hist. art. 1, 1 (2°) and Cod. hist. art. 1, 2 (4°); Savignano sul Rubicone, Rubiconia Accademia dei Filopatri di (=RAAdF), estate of Giovanni Critofano Amaduzzi; Montpellier, Bibliothèque Universitaire de Médecine, H 356 and H 433. There is an inventory of these notebooks: Tibal 1911. For this excerpting practice, see Décultot 2000 (German translation: Décultot 2004). For the history of Winckelmann’s manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, see Décultot 2001.

ticular to better define the share of empirical observation and book-based knowledge in Winckelmann's approach to ancient art.

Everything about the composition of these notebooks points to how much importance Winckelmann attached to the excerpts inside. In 1754 he explained to his friend Hieronymus Dieterich Berendis: "Meine Extrahits sind auf einen ganz anderen Fuß eingerichtet, und sehr angewachsen. Ich habe sie sehr sauber geschrieben: ich halte sie nunmehr vor einen großen Schatz, und wünschte, daß Du Zeit hättest daraus zu profitieren."²³ Winckelmann excerpted meticulously. On numerous manuscript pages he made the effort—in keeping with the typographic conventions of the time—to include the first syllables of the following page under the last line of the preceding page. In the margins he occasionally wrote letters in alphabetical order, and if necessary, traced words again which had faded with time—sure signs of scrupulous planning and frequent use (Figure 1).

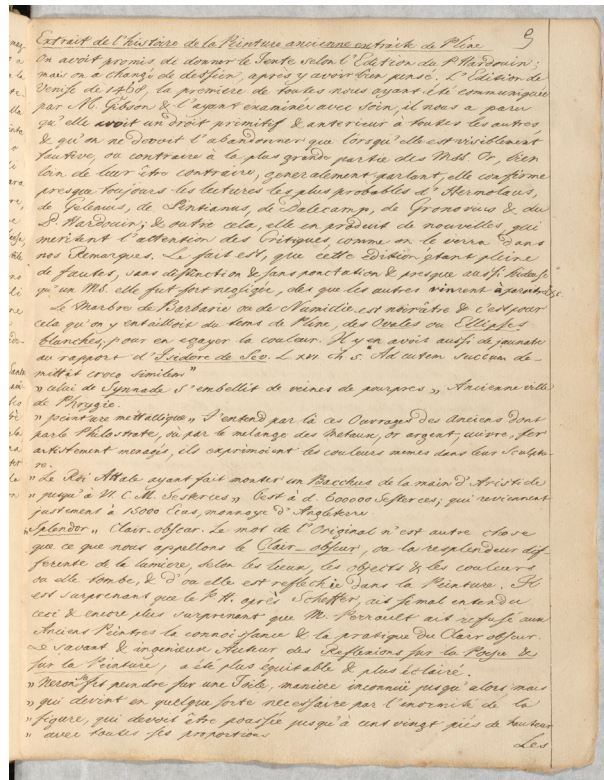


Figure 1: J. J. Winckelmann, *Extrait de l'histoire de la peinture ancienne extraite de Plin*, Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 61, fol. 5r.

²³ J. J. Winckelmann to Hieronymus Dieterich Berendis, 6 July 1754, in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 1, on 142 (translation: "My excerpts possess an entirely different dimension and have grown considerably. I have written them down in a very clean hand: I now consider them a great treasure and wish you could have time to benefit from them.").

In the early phase of Winckelmann's scholarly career, it is impossible to date the excerpts precisely. The first traces of his earliest forays in excerpting which are preserved in the manuscripts possibly date back to his stay at the university of Halle (1738–1740). Yet we know that Winckelmann must have become familiar with the excerpting technique at the beginning of the 1730s during his school years in Stendal, Berlin and Salzwedel. During the following stages of his life in Germany (Halle, Osterburg, Jena, Hadmersleben and later Seehausen), the body of excerpts steadily expanded. It grew by leaps and bounds especially during his long stay in Nöthnitz (1748–1754) as the librarian of the Imperial Count Heinrich von Büнау in Nöthnitz. In his letters from this period, Winckelmann explicitly mentioned the early morning hours (from 3 am to 7 am), during which time he dedicated himself to his preferred activity—cultivating his excerpt booklets.²⁴ During his time in Nöthnitz and Dresden, he proudly sent some of these booklets to friends who were not fortunate enough to have access to good libraries, and became anxious if his treasured excerpts were not promptly returned.²⁵ When he left Dresden for Rome in 1755, these booklets were among his most cherished resources.

If we are to believe Winckelmann's own accounts, everything changed at the end of 1755. After arriving in Italy, the scholar was apparently no longer inclined to read, but rather devoted himself to examining the artworks themselves. His correspondence from this period abounds with invectives against mere book-learning. "Man schreibe von nichts als man gesehen und gewiß weiß,"²⁶ he insists in a letter from Rome in 1758. The rule of direct visual inspection is one of the fundamental principles stated at the beginning of the history of the art of antiquity he wrote in Rome: "Ich habe alles, was ich zum Beweis angeführt habe, selbst und vielmal gesehen, und betrachten können, so wohl Gemälde und Statuen, als geschnittene Steine und Münzen."²⁷

But Winckelmann's stylized antinomy of reading and seeing, that is, the book knowledge he acquired before Rome and the sensory experience he gained in Rome and which his contemporaries and readers often emphasized, only partially corresponds with his actual working method and artistic experience. Naturally his move to Rome resulted in a profound shift in art perception. However, it is imperative to counter the widely held opinion—which originates in his self-fashion-

²⁴ J. J. Winckelmann to Konrad Friedrich Uden, 7 December 1749, in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 1, on 94.

²⁵ J. J. Winckelmann to Hieronymus Dieterich Berendis, 19 December 1754, 23 January 1755, 10 March 1755, in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 1, on 160, 164, and 166. He most often entrusted his excerpt booklets to his two friends Friedrich Wilhelm Peter Lamprecht (1728–1797) and Hieronymus Dieterich Berendis (1720–1783). In the letters cited here, Winckelmann expressed deep regret that Lamprecht made him wait so long before returning his precious notebooks. Johann Gottlieb Paalzow (1709–1792), instated as headmaster of the Latin school in Seehausen in 1739, emphasized Winckelmann's "skill in excerpting" ("Geschicklichkeit im Excerptiren"). Paalzow 1957, on 187.

²⁶ J. J. Winckelmann to P. von Stosch, 8 February 1758, in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 1, on 335 (translation: "One ought to write of nothing but what one has seen and knows for certain").

²⁷ Winckelmann 2002, on XXI [1st edn.] (translation: "All that I have cited as evidence—paintings, statues, gems, and coins—I have myself seen and examined repeatedly"; Winckelmann 2006, on 76).

ing and the image given by Justi, his biographer at the end of the nineteenth century, or by André Tibal, the author of his estate inventory in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France at the beginning of the twentieth century²⁸—that he had discontinued the practice of excerpting in Italy. Indeed, as an analysis of watermarks and the paper quality of this reading notes prove, he continued excerpting intensely in Rome.²⁹ It thus appears that Winckelmann did not so radically break with his old habit of scholarly reading and note taking as he himself was wont to claim. His study of antiquarian literature in Rome yielded an enormous amount of information on ancient numismatics, architecture and glyptics, which he fastidiously noted in his excerpt booklets. From Pausanias to Caylus, from Athanasius Kircher and Nicolas Fabri de Peiresc to Ezechiel Spanheim and Jacob Spon, no author is missing in this dizzying collection of Roman excerpts.³⁰ Even after direct, visual contact with the *Laocoön* group in the *Cortile del Belvedere*, he consulted antiquarian literature, from which he copied numerous notes on the *Laocoön*, such as the *Laocoön* descriptions by Joachim von Sandrart and Paolo Alesandro Maffei in *Teutsche Academie* (1675–1679) and *Raccolta di statue antiche et moderne* (1704).³¹

In terms of Winckelmann's excerpting method, there are distinct differences between his German and Italian periods. For example, the excerpts from the Italian period tend to be shorter, but also more thematically consistent. During his first period in Germany, Winckelmann's excerpts were copied in seemingly random order. The excerpts from this phase comprise the thematic spectrum of a *polyhistor*: ancient and modern literature, travel reports and dictionary articles,

²⁸ Justi 1866; Justi 1956, vol. 2, esp. 27–39, 51–86; Tibal 1911, on 12: “On voit ainsi qu’après son arrivée à Rome, Winckelmann ne se livre plus qu’avec modération à ce travail fastidieux [de collection d’extraits] [...]; l’étude des monuments et des œuvres d’art remplace pour lui l’étude des livres. Au contraire tant qu’il est en Allemagne, il doit se contenter d’une science de seconde main [...].” (Translation: “We can thus see that after his arrival in Rome, Winckelmann only engaged in this tedious work [i.e., excerpting activity] with moderation [...]; the study of the monuments and artworks replaced for him the study of books. On the contrary, as long as he was in Germany, he had to settle for second-hand science [...].”)

²⁹ There are numerous problems with determining the exact date of Winckelmann's excerpts. Winckelmann seldom noted the precise date in his booklets. However, it is possible to generally determine whether the excerpts were written in Germany or Italy by analyzing the quality of the paper and its watermarks. In Germany, Winckelmann used a rather coarse, grey paper with an easily recognizable Dutch watermark (I Villandry). One should note that some of the dates of the excerpts suggested by Tibal 1911 in the estate inventory are incorrect. Some excerpts Tibal had identified as “German” were actually written in Italy as the watermark and the paper quality prove. See Bockelkamp 1996. Tibal's dating of Winckelmann's excerpts is obviously driven by the dichotomy of reading and seeing he had found in Winckelmann's works as well as in nineteenth-century research on Winckelmann. See Justi 1866; Justi 1956, vol. 2, esp. 27–39, 51–86.

³⁰ For more on the excerpts from these works, see: Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vols. 63 and 67.

³¹ J. J. Winckelmann, excerpt from: J. von Sandrart, *Sculpturae veteris admiranda, sive delineae statuarum* (Norimbergae: Typis Christiani Sigismundi Frobergii sumtibus auctoris; Francofurti: Apud Michaëlem & Joh. Fridericum Endteros, & Johannem de Sandrart, 1680), Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 67, fol. 49v; J. J. Winckelmann, excerpt from: P. A. Maffei, *Raccolta di statue antiche e moderne* (Rome: Stamperia alla Pace, 1704), Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 67, fol. 50r–50v.

excerpts on medicine, natural history etc.³² He copied for example entire articles from the scholarly journal *Acta eruditorum* (Figure 2) or long excerpts from the *Teutsche Staats-, Reichs- und Käyser-Historie* by Simon Friedrich Hahn.³³

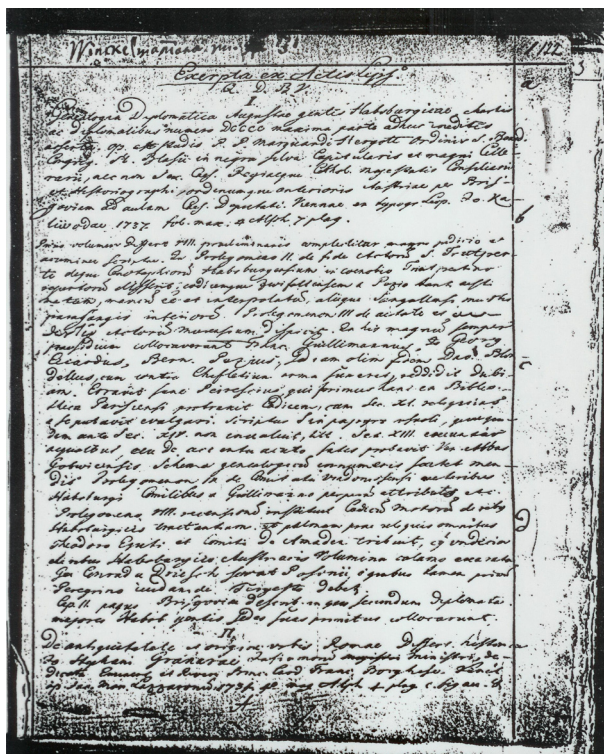


Figure 2: J. J. Winckelmann, excerpt from: *Acta eruditorum*, Hamburg, SU, Cod. hist. art. 1, 2 (4°), fol. 122.

His method changed in the 1750s when he began planning his first work *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke* in Nöthnitz. From then on, he collected excerpts in coherent thematic booklets or serials on Greek art, Roman history, modern artworks etc. His “Hefte” dedicated to the French Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns—especially to Charles Perrault’s *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes*—illustrate this trend (Figure 3).

³² Vol. 72 of the Parisian Winckelmann estate, which contains excerpts from the Nöthnitz period (1748–1754), provides a good example of this eclecticism.

³³ Winckelmann’s excerpts from the *Acta eruditorum* are stored in Hamburg, SU, Cod. hist. art. 1, 2 (4), fol. 122r–139v. The library also possesses excerpts from S. F. Hahn, *Vollständige Einleitung zu der teutschen Staats-, Reichs- und Käyser-Historie und dem daraus fließenden jure publico*, 4 vols. (Halle and Leipzig: Johann Friedrich Zeitler, 1721–1724): Cod. hist. art. 1, 2 (4), fol. 99v–111v.

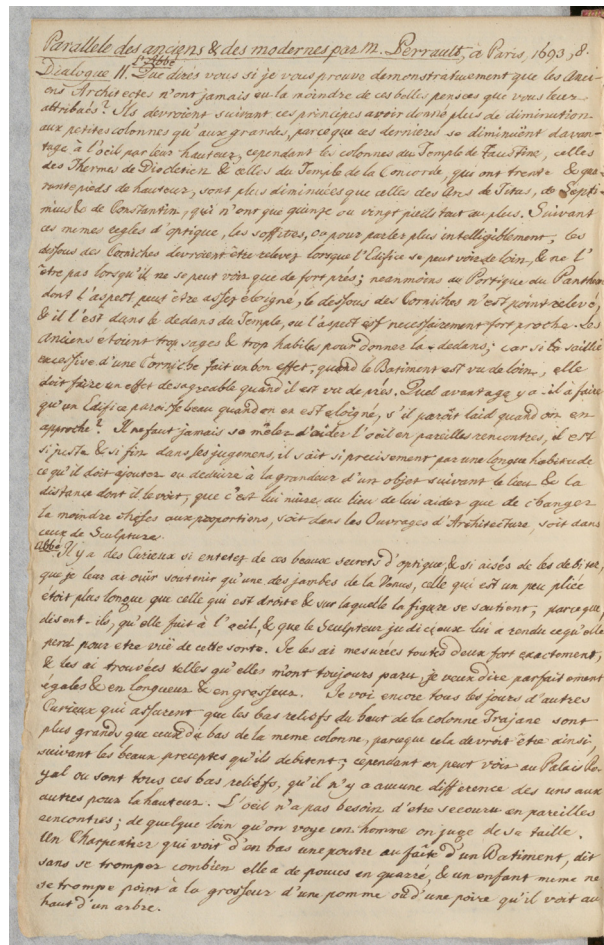


Figure 3: J. J. Winckelmann, excerpt from: Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui regarde les arts et les sciences* (Paris: Jean Baptiste Coignard, 1688), Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 62, fol. 26v.

This tendency became more pronounced after moving to Rome. He now exhibited a predilection for antiquarian, classical philological and artistic topics. Unrelated topics—such as notes on medicine of the kind that filled several booklets in Germany³⁴—were now avoided.

One gets the impression that the mature Winckelmann gradually disposed of his almost pious respect for whatever he read, which—especially prior to the publication of his first work, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke* (1755)—had moved him to copy pages of text word for word on a wide array of topics. This development, evident in his private collection of excerpts, reflects

³⁴ Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 64. For more on these medical and natural-scientific excerpts, see Déculot 2011.

a fundamental change in Winckelmann's self-perception starting in the 1750s: the reader who had once revered the excerpted text had become an autonomous author himself. What had begun in his first German phase as a crusade to massively reproduce the knowledge of other scholars now clearly served as the basis for producing his own discourse.

The arrangement and internal organization of the excerpts offer informative insights into this transformation. In the early phase of his stay in Germany, Winckelmann excerpted without any apparent criteria of classification. It is as if his unquenchable thirst for knowledge led him to copy notes from any and every book and scientific area without consideration for their thematic coherence. His dictionary excerpts provide eloquent testimony to his broad-based, almost encyclopaedic interest. He read the German translation of Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* twice from cover to cover and documented his intensive study in three impressive compilations which he likely copied in various stages between 1742 and his stay in Nöthnitz. One volume of excerpts comprises approximately 700 pages, and two other booklets each have a total of some 40 pages (Figure 4).³⁵ In terms of sheer scope, Winckelmann's excerpts from Bayle's dictionary comprise the largest share of this handwritten library.

Winckelmann's arrival in Italy also resulted in a tangible change in the organization of his excerpt collection. While in Rome Winckelmann not only expanded this collection with new reading gems, he also began intensively curating the material as his own personal handwritten library. Shortly after getting settled in Rome, he started cataloguing his collection of excerpts—a project which remained unfinished.³⁶ At the same time, he began classifying his earlier excerpts into categories. In a catalogue entitled *Collectanea ad historiam artis*, he compiled, for example, excerpts on Pausanias, Strabo, Lucian and Pliny, which he then attempted to classify further into more specific categories: architecture, Olympic games, liberty of Greece (Figure 5 a/b) etc.³⁷ In this respect, his art-historical project was shaped by *both* his close examination of the artworks and his renewed study of his handwritten library. Winckelmann himself hardly remarked on this early reading excursion, but evidence of this foray can be found in the bibliogra-

³⁵ From his first reading of Bayle's dictionary in Hadmersleben in 1742, Winckelmann produced a considerable collection of excerpts which comprises an entire 676-page volume of the Paris estate: BnF, Dpt. Mss. Fonds allemand, vol. 76, 1–676 (by way of exception, these excerpts booklets are numbered as *pages*; normally the numbering referred to *sheets*). Winckelmann mentions these excerpts in a letter to Imperial Count Heinrich von Bünau, dated 10 July 1748: "Baylii Dictionarium bis perlegi, et vastum inde volumen Miscellaneorum conscripsi." Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 1, on 80. Between 1742 and 1755 he produced two smaller booklets of excerpts from Bayle's dictionary: Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 72, fol. 176r–191v and Hamburg, SU, Cod. hist. art. 1, 2 (4), fol. 4r–9v. All these excerpts were taken from the German translation of the Baylesian dictionary by Johann Christoph Gottsched: Peter [Pierre] Bayle, *Historisches und Critisches Wörterbuch, nach der neuesten Auflage von 1740 ins Deutsche übersetzt; auch mit einer Vorrede und verschiedenen Anmerkungen sonderlich bey anstößigen Stellen versehen, von Johann Christoph Gottsched* (4 vols., Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1741–1744).

³⁶ Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 73, fol. 46r–68r ("Catalogus").

³⁷ Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 57, fol. 198r–233v, where one finds such categories as "De Architectura" (fol. 204v), "Ludi Olympici" (fol. 205r), "Libertas Graeciae" (fol. 215v), "De proprietate Graecae Linguae" (fol. 219r), "Marmora Graeciae" (fol. 221v), "Das Übertriebene in der Kunst" (fol. 230v), etc. See also: vol. 59, fol. 252r–273v; vol. 69, fol. 43r–126v.

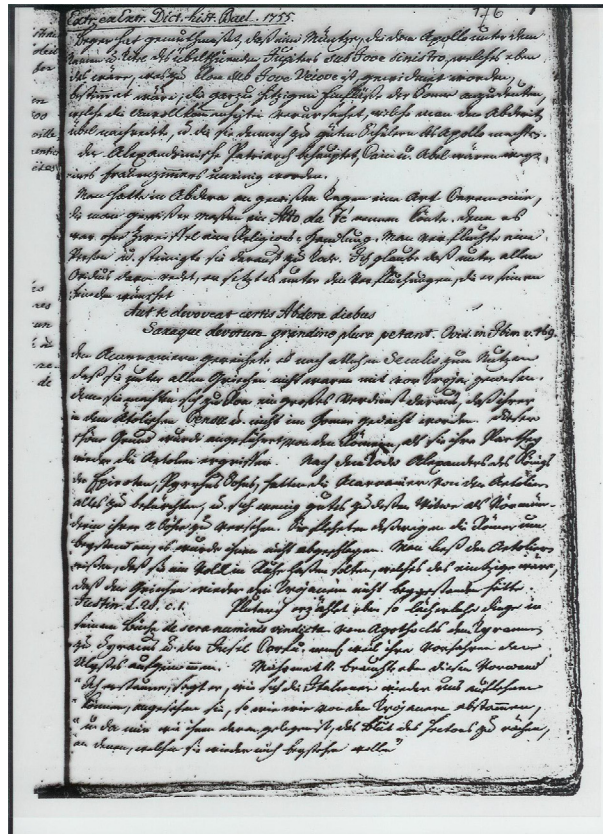


Figure 4: J. J. Winckelmann, excerpt from: Pierre Bayle, *Historisches und Critisches Wörterbuch, nach der neuesten Auflage von 1740 ins Deutsche übersetzt [...] von Johann Christoph Gottscheden* (4 vols., Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1741–1744), Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 72, fol. 176r.

phy he provided at the start of his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* and which largely comprises those works he had excerpted from his own collection of excerpts.³⁸

Despite various shifts in the arrangement and purpose of the excerpt booklets, there is a remarkable constant that links the German and Italian phases: Winckelmann never added any personal remarks or comments to his painstakingly copied excerpts and only very rarely did he take the liberty of slightly modifying the original texts by abbreviating certain passages. In this regard, Winckelmann held a quite particular position in the contemporary practice of excerpting. Several decades earlier, Montesquieu often appended personal comments to his own excerpts. Years later, Jean Paul had no scruples with intertwining selected lines from other writers with own texts.³⁹ Winckelmann, on the contrary, strictly adhered to

³⁸ Winckelmann 2002, on XLI–XLVIII [1st edn.] (unfortunately not reproduced in Winckelmann 2006).

³⁹ Volpilhac-Auger 2014; Müller 1988; Will 2013.

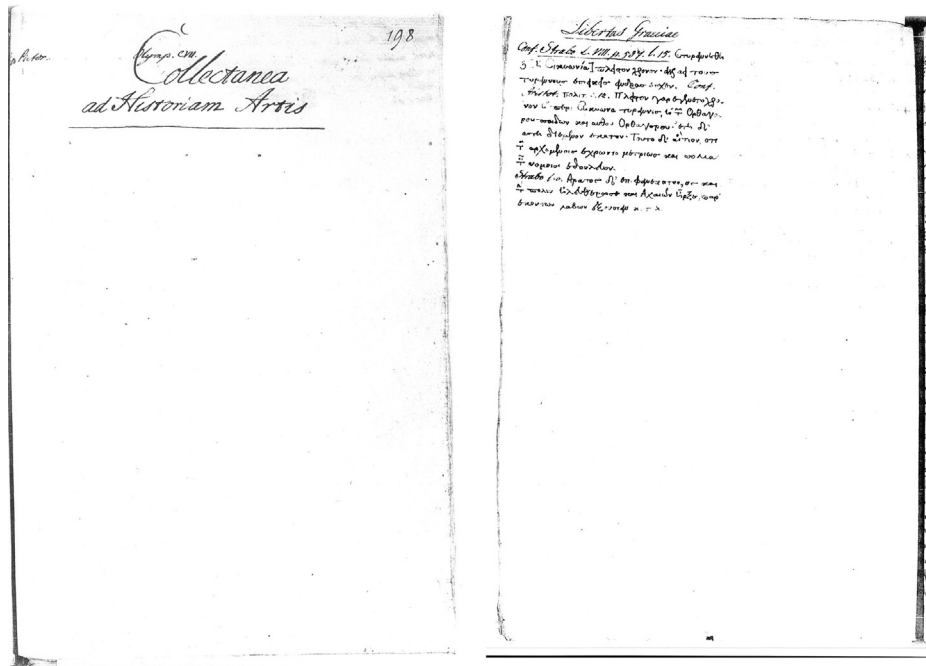


Figure 5a/b: J. J. Winckelmann, “Collectanea ad Historiam Artis/Libertas Graeciae,” Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 57, fol. 198r (= Figure a), 215v (= Figure b).

the original texts. This obvious respect for the original, which he showed in the German and Italian phases of his life, is reflected in the precision with which he documented the bibliographical sources of his excerpts: the author’s name, title, volume, edition and page number are often explicitly cited.

4. A Socially Determined Practice?

One of the main reasons for Winckelmann’s excerpting activity is certainly rooted in his social background. Books were still precious possessions in the middle of the eighteenth century. Born the son of a simple cobbler, Winckelmann managed with great effort to become a tutor and librarian, and in his collection of excerpts he found a surrogate for those magnificent book collections which he could not purchase. Yet beyond such sociological considerations, excerpting tapped into something deeper, something that had to do with the innermost relationship to the handwritten word, namely the act of taking possession of a book. For Winckelmann, as for anyone who devoted himself to the art of excerpting, possessing a book was by no means the same as purchasing a printed volume, but rather copying its most important passages by hand and saving the core content in one’s own and very personal booklets. Only through the physical act of copying could the excerptor truly take possession of what he read. Winckelmann owned very few printed books while in Germany. But it seems that even the mere owner-

ship of a printed work was not enough for him, as he also excerpted from books he owned in printed form.⁴⁰

One of Winckelmann's manuscripts reveals the essential importance he placed on the act of excerpting. In 1767, one year prior to his violent death, he wrote a booklet entitled *Collectanea zu meinem Leben* ("Collectanea on my life"), a curious form of autobiographical narrative (Figure 6). On a few pages he retraced his own life with the help of 67 uncommented quotations from other authors, which he borrowed from his immense store of excerpts.⁴¹ He described his serious youth

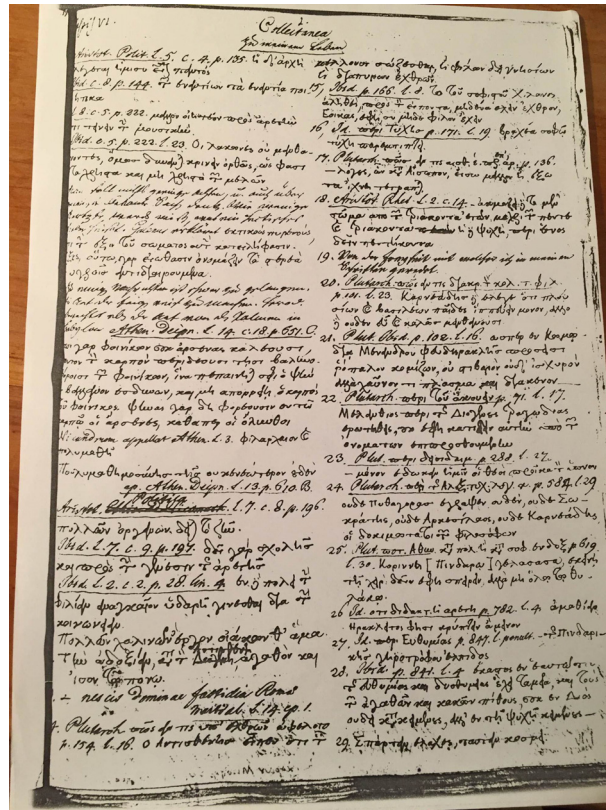


Figure 6: J. J. Winckelmann, "Collectanea zu meinem Leben," Savignano sul Rubicone (Italy), RADf, estate of Giovanni Cristofano Amaduzzi (classis VI).

⁴⁰ Among the works in Winckelmann's modest book collection was *Anthologia Graeca*; see J. J. Winckelmann to K. F. Uden, 24 May 1751 and 3 March 1752, in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 1, on 105, 110. He copied extensive passages from this book: Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 60, fol. 168r–245v (also includes empty pages).

⁴¹ J. J. Winckelmann, "Collectanea zu meinem Leben," Savignano sul Rubicone, RADf, estate of Giovanni Cristofano Amaduzzi (classis VI). The manuscript has been published in Winckelmann 1952–1957, vol. 4, 154–163. See also: Schadewaldt 1960; Déculot 2000, esp. 9–10 (German translation: Déculot 2004, esp. 11).

with the words of Ovid, and he used a passage from Sallust to describe his numerous voyages. A portrait of himself emerged from this cobbling together of quotes from “others,” which is based exclusively on a succession of excerpts. The existential dimension of the art of excerpting is particularly clear in these remarkable pages. Winckelmann’s act of excerpting texts by other authors was work for his own autobiography. For him, excerpting other works was a form of writing about himself.

Yet Winckelmann’s practice of excerpting was not merely the product of personal preferences, but also corresponds to the old and well-established scholarly tradition, rooted in antiquity, and expanding in the Renaissance, which has been mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Winckelmann’s relationship to this tradition is quite ambivalent. In many respects, he clearly broke with the humanistic method of excerpting. In contrast to the strict models of classification in the sixteenth century which very often adhered to a given topic, his excerpts are not categorized: they only follow his reading rhythm and derive from his individual interests—a phenomenon that is actually not new in the middle of the eighteenth century. With the growing trend of *adversaria* at the end of the sixteenth and during the seventeenth century, the free organization of excerpts had become increasingly prevalent.⁴² Their use was explicitly recommended by Morhof.⁴³

Although this testifies to Winckelmann’s relative modernity and originality *within* the history of the art of excerpting, the application of this reading method itself reveals him to be a follower of a time-honoured tradition that many scholars in the eighteenth century had come to present as obsolete—even if they practice it intensely.⁴⁴ In France where the disparity between eloquence and scholarship became pronounced rather early in the seventeenth century, many harshly criticized the “pédanterie” of the “compilateurs” in the words of Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac (1597–1654).⁴⁵ In 1725 the progressive German pedagogue Friedrich Andreas Hallbauer (1692–1750) claimed that excerpting was emblematic of old-fashioned scientific forms which obstructed the path to thinking for oneself.⁴⁶ And in 1792 Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–1799), whose “scrapbooks” (“Sudelbücher”) arose from a tradition very similar to that of excerpt booklets, sharply criticized the German “excerpting *comptoir*” (“Exzerprier-*Comptoir*”).⁴⁷ Neither Winckelmann’s work nor his letters contain such attacks against the art of excerpting. Rather, Winckelmann seems to have sought to adapt an old tradition to new purposes and personal uses.

5. Deconstructing an Antinomy

The reason why Winckelmann did not follow many of his contemporaries by decrying excerpting as an outdated and deleterious scholarly activity is certainly to

⁴² Chatelain 1997.

⁴³ Morhof 1747, esp. 559–562; Moss 1996; Zedelmaier 2000.

⁴⁴ Décultot 2014b, esp. 40–44.

⁴⁵ Moss 1996, on 259.

⁴⁶ Hallbauer 1725, on 289.

⁴⁷ Lichtenberg 1967–1992, vol. 1, on 806 (“Sudelbuch” J₁ 1094) and on 728 (“Sudelbuch” J₁ 509). See also Arburg 2014.

be found in the function fulfilled by excerpts in his cognition patterns. There is no debating that direct visual contact with the artworks played a prominent role in the Italian phase of his career and works. After his move to Rome where he quickly gained a European reputation as an outstanding *connoisseur* of antiquities, he praised the direct and meticulous examination of the artworks as the sole source of true art knowledge, denouncing all previous approaches of art-historical investigation as cold, book-based scholarship, and elaborating a new description method, which paid more attention to the materiality of the ancient monuments. The Roman Belvedere descriptions which have been found in his handwritten notes are filled with anatomical and technical details (descriptions of tendons, muscles, chisel marks etc.) which are not found in his earlier descriptions of ancient sculptures such as the *Laocoön Group* that he had written in Germany, far away from the three dimensional sculptures.⁴⁸ Among the important insights he gained through his direct contact with the artworks was a new-found understanding of problems of restoration, on which he began writing a treatise.⁴⁹

However, as mentioned above, this shift to empiricism does not go hand in hand with an interruption of his excerpting activity, but obviously combines easily with it: after his installation in Italy Winckelmann not only continues to enrich his “Hefte” with excerpts, but also extends his excerpting activity to new areas, such as his autobiography, and began re-reading, classifying and exploiting his excerpt booklets intensely. There is therefore evidence that he did not see any contradiction between his excerpting activity and this empirical turn. The reason for this continuity lies in his understanding of excerpting: in accordance with a long tradition, particularly prevalent in the field of the natural sciences of the seventeenth and eighteenth century,⁵⁰ excerpting means for him first of all choosing, making a selection in a complex set of data—a selecting activity whose key organ is the eye. In this perspective, excerpting is closely related to observing in the peculiar sense Winckelmann gave to the notion of *sehen* or *betrachten* as a selective and concentrated optical perception of some parts of an artwork. Handwritten excerpts are therefore only the textual variant of a general activity of selective observation in which the organ of sight plays a central role.

Evidence of this can be found in his notebooks which contain, alongside the reading notes themselves, various notes on artworks he saw, on libraries he visited or on the climate, landscape and food in Italy⁵¹—in other words, on things he observed or deemed useful for his excursions in Rome, Florence or Naples. In these notebooks, it is often difficult to separate genuinely personal observations or reflections from information potentially borrowed from readings. Sometimes Winckelmann refers to a source he has read, sometimes not, even if we can assume that the note comes from a read book. Unlike his numerous booklets

⁴⁸ Zeller 1955; Pfothenhauer et al. 1995, esp. 149–193.

⁴⁹ Winckelmann 1996.

⁵⁰ Krämer 2016; Yeo 2014.

⁵¹ J. J. Winckelmann, [personal notes entitled] “Nachrichten von der Vatikanischen Bibliothek,” “Vatikanische Bibliothek,” “Librerie private,” “Librerie private di Roma,” Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 57, fol. 63r–64v; for his personal notes concerning the society, the climate, the landscape etc. in Italy, Rome, Venice, Florence, mixed with excerpts from books, see: Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 57, fol. 144v–194r.

with precise referencing of reading extracts, these notebooks do not clearly distinguish his “own” observations from “second-hand” descriptions.

The organization and content of these “mixed” notebooks suggest that Winckelmann probably saw no substantial difference between these two spheres: for him, collecting places and writing down personal observations belonged to the same practice, namely to excerpting. In this, he shared the broad understanding of *excerpere* which shaped the late modern period. In one of the chapters on excerpting methods in *Polyhistor litterarius, philosophicus et practicus*, Daniel Georg Morhof (1639–1691) recommends making “*adversaria*, in which we collect what comes to mind while reading or during daily reflection, also what we saw or what others told us.”⁵²

Despite his repeated attacks on book scholarship, Winckelmann demonstrated through his work experience that reading and observing were in no way disparate, or even contrary, but rather highly complementary activities whose intimate bond rested on seeing. This is undoubtedly the reason for his particular interest in the organ of the eye. During the year he studied medicine at the university of Jena (1741–1742), he collected important excerpts on natural history.⁵³ In these medical excerpts, he brings up the question again and again: What is seeing? Can sight alone lead to true understanding? The physiology of the eye, the laws of optics, the improvement of visual acuity by means of optical devices are recurring themes throughout his handwritten collection of excerpts. He copied Jean Mery’s observations of the iris, offered detailed descriptions of numerous eye ailments taken from Allen’s medical treatise, and expressed interest in Réaumur’s analyzes on a new shade of purple. In Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle*, he transcribed elaborate explanations on the close and necessary involvement of the sense of sight and touch for understanding.⁵⁴ And regarding the optical function of the eye, he dedicated one of the most stunning drawing in his handwritten library: Johann Gottlob Krüger’s depiction of the effect of light rays on the human eye (Figure 7).⁵⁵

It is therefore important to emphasize the matrix role of the praxis of excerpting in Winckelmann’s conception of “empirical” art observation in the Roman period. Because of his intense experience with selecting and copying textual extracts, Winckelmann was able to elaborate a technique of optical observation of statues which remained closely related to the attentive and selective “reading” he

⁵² Morhof 1747, on 563: “Utilissimum est, non tantum sub Locis Excerpta digerere, sed & Adversaria quaedam conficere, in quibus congeramus, quicquid unquam cogitatum a nobis est, in lectione Auctorum, aut in quotidiana meditatione: deinde quicquid vel vidimus, aut ab aliis nobis narratum est.” For a comment on this passage and for a German translation, see Zedelmaier 2015, on 58.

⁵³ Décultot 2011.

⁵⁴ J. J. Winckelmann, excerpt from: Jean Mery, “Anatomie de l’Iris de l’œil,” *Mémoires de l’Académie des Sciences*, Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 64, fol. 12r; J. J. Winckelmann, excerpt from: John Allen, *Abrégé de toute la médecine pratique, où l’on trouve les sentimens des plus habiles médecins sur les maladies [...] revue, corrigée [...] par M. Boudon*, 4th edn., (8 vols., Paris, 1750), Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 64, fol. 44v; J. J. Winckelmann, excerpt from: René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur, “Sur une nouvelle pourpre,” *Mémoires de l’Académie des Sciences*, Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 64, fol. 14r; J. J. Winckelmann, excerpt from: Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, *Histoire naturelle générale & particulière*, vol. 3 (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1749), Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 64, fol. 5v–6r.

⁵⁵ J. J. Winckelmann: excerpt from: J. G. Krüger, *Naturlehre*, vol. 2 (Halle: Hemmerde, 1742), Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 64, fol. 58r.

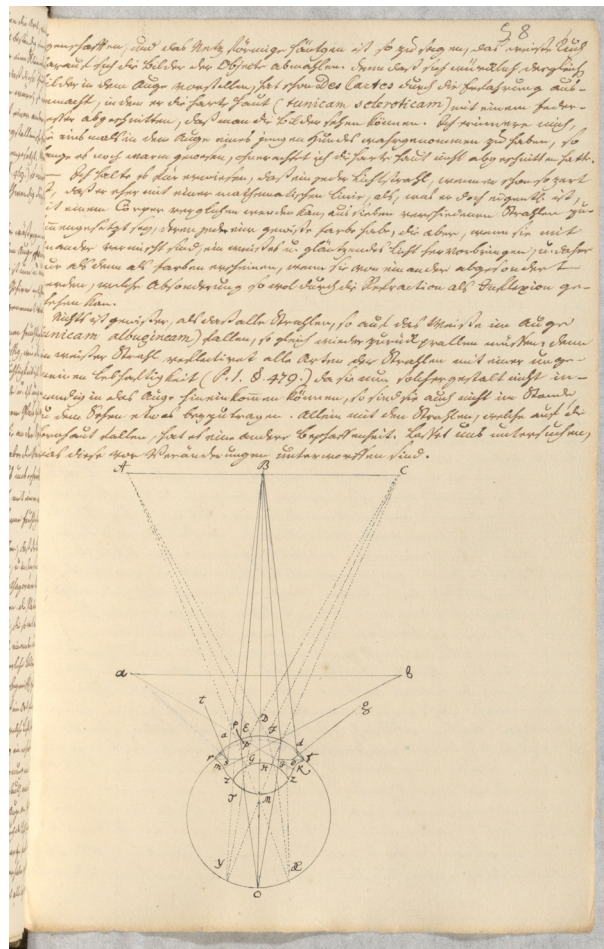


Figure 7: J. J. Winckelmann, excerpt from: Johann Gottlob Krüger, *Naturlehre*, vol. 2 (Halle: Hemmerde, 1742), Paris, BnF, Dpt. Mss., Fonds allemand, vol. 64, fol. 58r.

already practiced with the books. From this point of view, it is impossible to describe Winckelmann’s epistemological position in the Roman period as the result of an empirical turn that made him move from the books to the “other” world of the artefacts. The fact that Winckelmann continued to cultivate the practice of excerpting without interruption from Germany to Italy is significant for the close intertwining he saw between these two activities.

6. Final Remarks

Neither the fact that Winckelmann continues to make excerpts in Rome, nor the importance of this activity for the genesis of his work are in themselves surprising: they make him the heir of a well-established tradition of scholarly practices of

reading and writing, widely shared by his contemporaries in the eighteenth century and a long time afterwards. More surprising however is the little interest that the history of art history showed in this practice. There are profound epistemological reasons for this, which are related to the genesis of art history as a modern academic discipline: history of art, in its modern definition, considers itself as primarily based on the direct examination of objects, not of texts, and traditionally keeps a certain distance with philology, its most significant rival in the map of modern academic disciplines throughout the nineteenth century.

Winckelmann, a tutelary figure of art history as a modern discipline, plays a central role in this constellation. On the one hand, he is—with Caylus—one of the first and most important promoters of the paradigm of observation for the production of a historical discourse on art, as his immediate contemporaries have rightly perceived. Lessing's or Heyne's objections to his interpretation of the marble *Laocoön* or of other statues are based on philological concerns and explicitly refer to the primacy of the text as legitimate source of knowledge on ancient art.⁵⁶ But Winckelmann also belongs to a tradition in which the paradigm of observation applies without contradiction as well to texts as to objects, as shown by the continuity of its excerpting activity between the German and the Italian phase of his biography.

Winckelmann's belonging to this double tradition is reflected by a dissociation between practice and practice discourse starting from the Italian phase. During the German phase of his life, he often refers in his letters to his excerpts, but hardly evokes them during his Italian phase, even if he continues to excerpt intensely. In this point, Winckelmann is an eminent representative of a profound shift in the history of excerpting in the modern era: from the eighteenth century, excerpting tends to disappear from the scholarly discourse, but remains structuring in scholarly practices themselves.⁵⁷ To fully understand this mutation and its multiple implications for some key notions of modern scholarship and literature like authorship, originality or empiricity, it is important to focus the study of excerpting practices, which has given rise to remarkable studies on the Early Modern period in the last decades, on later and in this respect less known periods.

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⁵⁶ Lessing 1990; Heyne 1963.

⁵⁷ Courses on excerpting disappear from the curriculum of German universities in the eighteenth century. See Zedelmaier 2016.

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