

## BOOK REVIEW

*Winckelmann & the Invention of Antiquity. History and Aesthetics in the Age of Altertumswissenschaft.* By KATHERINE HARLOE. Classical Presences. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xxvi + 275. ISBN 978-0-19-969584-3

This learned book is well worth reading and pondering. It examines one of the central figures in the transition from eighteenth century antiquarianism to nineteenth century *Altertumswissenschaft*: Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Harloe's goal is not to provide another biography of Winckelmann, but to use Winckelmann's work as the focal point for a study of how the discipline of Classics participated in the more general "emancipation of the arts faculties of universities from their traditional subordination to the 'professional' faculties of medicine, law, and theology ..." (xv).

To be sure, in pursuit of this goal, Harloe offers, in Part I, a rich and well-researched account of Winckelmann's intellectual development from his first publications to his climactic *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764). Winckelmann is not treated in isolation but is contextualized both in Germany and Italy so that his distinctive methods and contribution can be more clearly appreciated. In Part II, she treats the reception of Winckelmann's work by classicists Christian Gottlob Heyne and Friedrich August Wolf, and, in Part III, by the poet, theologian, and philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder. Again, Harloe's goal is not reception history for its own sake but reception utilized as an index for the formation of classicists' sense of professional identity. One surprising outcome of the study is the realization that Winckelmann's program of an "imaginative reconstruction the Greek and Roman past" made—and makes—him an "uncomfortable ancestor" for later classicists (xxi).

The book ably traces the arc of Winckelmann's reputation. In the late eighteenth century, it was fraught as scholars such as Heyne pointed out the many errors of fact and judgment that mar his *magnum opus*, the *Geschichte*. In the nineteenth century, thanks to his biographer Goethe and to Eduard Gerhard, initiator

of the first of the many annual *Winckelmannsfeier* at German universities, Winckelmann came to have his special status of *heros ktistes* of the profession. However, as the century progressed, his flaws came to the fore. For Wilamowitz, writing the history of the discipline just after the First World War, these errors “do not matter at all,” and Winckelmann is seen to be important because “in producing a history of style such as no scholar had ever dreamed of... Winckelmann set an example which all succeeding ages should look up to with veneration.”<sup>1</sup> But after World War II, his reputation plummeted to a very low point, indeed, as German classicists questioned the whole project of neoclassical humanism that Winckelmann helped to launch.

So there is no doubt but that Winckelmann has become an “uncomfortable ancestor” in his native country. At stake is the difference between two views of education and two methodological visions of *Altertumswissenschaft*. For education, the question is whether students should be trained in a set of canonical texts, monuments, and values that arose in classical antiquity, or if that canon is now out of date or, indeed, not even in need of updating because the whole notion of a canon is suspect. Winckelmann clearly stands on the side of those who believe in the privileged place of the classical canon.

In terms of scholarship, the relevant polar opposites are between a methodology that is rational and one that is empirical or even sceptical—a contrast that we seemingly find replayed in ancient studies in every generation, if always in new ways. Winckelmann, with his bold theorizing about the development of ancient art, clearly belongs to the rational school. His earliest critics such as Heyne belonged to the empirical school and criticized not only his specific blunders but also the very basis of his program of looking for an organic motive force to the development of art in antiquity.

Harloe shows why Winckelmann is, indeed, an uncomfortable ancestor to serve as the founding hero of *Altertumswissenschaft*, whether or not we limit consideration to Germany. But this *Unbehagen* is not merely something to be regretted: as Harloe also shows, it strikes at the heart of what it means to grapple with the past, especially one transmitted to us with so many gaps and with so much uncertainty. If there is to be such a discipline as *Altertumswissenschaft* as a living and constantly evolving enterprise, it requires that for every Winckelmann, who brilliantly, as the

<sup>1</sup>Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *History of Classical Scholarship*, translated by Alan Harris (London: Duckworth, 1982) 96 (originally published in 1921).

book's subtitle puts it, "invents antiquity" to fill the evidentiary void, there will also inevitably be a Heyne to carp on the sidelines and to critique the results.

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