

# A

## Antiquarianism



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### Abstract

The aim of this entry is to provide a definition for Renaissance antiquarianism as a cultural phenomenon that influenced the way the past was interpreted between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. This cultural pathway represented a methodological perspective which involved the cross-referencing of heterogeneous sources, strongly linked to mankind's perception of time, and which helped to shape historical consciousness. The focus then turns to the history of the phenomenon and an explanation of its methodology.

## Scholarship

The first attempt to describe the phenomenon of antiquarianism as one of the key moments in the evolution of Renaissance thought can be traced back to the 1950s. Stimulated by the definition formulated by Arnaldo Momigliano in his seminal article “Ancient History and the Antiquarian” (1950), the impact of material sources on the development of modern thought began to be clearly identified as a crucial factor in the classical tradition and the history of ideas. According to Momigliano, antiquarianism was a matter of

historical method, which involved “the systematic collection of relics from the past” and their interpretation with a critical approach. He considered it to be strongly linked to mankind's perception of time which, thanks to the accumulation of remains over the centuries, helped to shape a deeper historical consciousness.

Scholars such as Eugenio Garin and Roberto Weiss attempted to coax out further aspects by taking into consideration the experience of philosophers and humanists from a diachronic perspective: Garin's *L'Umanesimo italiano: filosofia e vita civile nel Rinascimento* (1952) and Weiss's *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical antiquity* (1969), offered general overviews of the many phases of this cultural movement. The monograph by Peter Burke, *The Renaissance sense of the past* (1969), the work of Sebastiano Timpanaro, *La genesi del Metodo di Lachman* (1960), and Silvia Rizzo, *Il lessico filologico degli umanisti* (1973), on Renaissance philological techniques and the many other studies conducted on the humanist method all shed further light on the origin of antiquarianism.

Important contributions to this area were made by Angelo Mazzocco, who explored these dynamics during the fifteenth century – especially in his *Flavio Biondo and the Antiquarian Tradition* (1985) – and by the studies of Anthony Grafton, who opened up several pathways for investigating the various aspects of this subject between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, his essays on Angelo Poliziano (1977), Joseph Scaliger

(1983–1991), and Leon Battista Alberti (2000), as well as his collection of essays, *Bring out your dead: the past as revelation* (2001), all represent milestones in the field. Salvatore Settis, especially in his *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana* (1984–1986), increased enormously the paradigms of the classical tradition within in the arts.

The strong foundations put in place by these masters have been built on more recently by several scholars, including Leonard Barkan, in the field of archaeology (1999); William Stenhouse, in epigraphy (2005), collecting (2014), and the idea of antiquarianism in general (2017); Christian Dekesel (1998), Federica Missere Fontana (2009), and John Cunnally (2016), in numismatics; Ingo Herklotz, who analyzed the figure of the antiquarian scholar (2012) as well several cases of ecclesiastical antiquarianism (2017) and antiquarianism in art (2019); Peter Miller, who approached antiquarianism with a geographical print (2015) and its interactions with collecting finds from antiquity (2017); Monica Centanni, who carried out a profound analysis of the many manifestations of classical tradition and rebirth of antiquity (2017); Kathleen Christian and Bianca De Divitiis, who investigated the development of local antiquarian surveys throughout Europe (2018); Joan Carbonell and Gerard Gonzalez Germain (2020), who broadened the views on epigraphic scholarship; and Stefan Bauer, who unveiled new aspects of antiquarian studies within the context of ecclesiastical history (2019 and 2021). All these scholars have brought new readings to the multifarious and complex interpretations of this field.

Nevertheless, the concept of Renaissance antiquarianism per se has not yet been completely and fully defined: this remains very much a work in progress which deserves a thorough multidisciplinary examination of the phenomenon from a transnational perspective. The very nature of Renaissance antiquarianism means it cannot be reduced to a simple formulation, nor can it be encapsulated in a single history: antiquarianism during the Renaissance is represented by a multitude of coexisting formulations that are expressed through a plurality of histories.

## History

There are specific historical reasons why Renaissance antiquarianism became a vital piece in the puzzle of how to approach knowledge. Developing at the same time as new philological trends that found support from the increase in the number of archaeological investigations conducted, its history fully embraces the spirit of Humanism. Starting in Italy, antiquarianism spread throughout Europe between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, at which point the new scientific culture, which had initially been favored by antiquarian studies, began to establish a decisive influence as society moved toward a new phase of modernity.

Antiquarianism's origins date back to around the beginning of the fourteenth century in Padua, Veneto, where scholars such as Lovato Lovati (1240–1309) and Albertino Mussato (1261–1329) began rewriting the history of classics by removing the medieval influences from these texts. The work of Giovanni de Matocciis (death 1337) of Verona is also worthy of mention, as he adorned the margins of the manuscript of his *Historia imperialis* with pictorial representations of the emperors that corresponded to his narrative and which were somehow inspired by ancient coins.

Concurrent and corresponding phenomena took place in other areas of Italy. In Rome and its surrounding areas, interest toward and investigations of ancient ruins can be detected almost simultaneously: proto-humanists among whom Giovanni Colonna (1298–1343) and Zanobi da Strada (1312–1361) explored libraries discovering ancient manuscripts and started collecting and interpreting ancient epigraphic inscriptions. Cola di Rienzo's (1313–1354) public reading of the *Lex de imperio Vespasiani* represents an iconic transitional moment to a new perception of the antique and its role in history.

Nonetheless, the title of “founding father of Renaissance antiquarianism” can justifiably be attributed to Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), who began developing an interest in the study of remains from antiquity in parallel with the many ancient manuscripts that he discovered. Within

the broader restoration of the “golden age Latin,” Petrarch’s followers, such as Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), Niccolò Niccoli (1365–1437), and Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), represent the most prominent examples of how this humanistic sensitivity helped antiquarianism to develop in complexity. The Loggia dei Lanzi was being erected in Florence at precisely that time (c. 1396), clear evidence that the revival in literary output was matched by a resurgence in classical architecture.

A fundamental contribution to the development of this cultural dynamic was provided by Ciriaco d’Ancona (1391–1452), who, on account of his detailed descriptions of antiquity carried out during his many journeys throughout the Mediterranean, could very well be considered to be the initiator of modern archaeology. At much the same time, Giovanni Marcanova (c. 1410–1467) depicted Roman antiquities in his manuscripts, while Flavio Biondo (1392–1463) rewrote the history of Rome and many other Italian cities in his *Roma Instaurata* and *Roma Triumphans* by linking his classical readings with the findings of numerous inspections made on location. It is also interesting to note that Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446), inspired by the Pantheon in Rome, projected the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence by applying the knowledge obtained from his observation of Roman ruins. He achieved this through his increased knowledge of forgotten elements of classical architecture and by using them to develop modern solutions: ancient source became the doorway to a new creation.

As sources of different types were uncovered, the understanding gradually dawned that texts and material findings could be complementary elements. This realization became essential for the interpenetration of the concept of history and cultural heritage, which implied the emergence of a renewed sensitivity to the unitary coherence of classical tradition. In essence, the antiquarian perspective embodied the spirit that allowed Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) to read Vitruvius critically, to write *De re aedificatoria*, and to conceive the facade of the Basilica of Sant’Andrea in Mantova as a Roman triumphal arch. Alberti was also the creator of the *Certamen Coronarium*

(1441), a poetry contest which celebrated the incorporation of the Latin quantitative metric system into the Italian language – the purpose was to translate the structure of ancient poetry into contemporary language.

In the late fifteenth century, the driving force behind this evolution of thought is considered to be Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494), who constructed a critical method in his *Miscellanea* that was so effective that it became the benchmark for the antiquarian scholars who followed. His intuitions in the field of classical philology, which were based on manuscript witnesses, the identification of linguistic usages through the history of language, the constitution of cultural models, the comparative technique, and a rudimentary paleography, brought to light what was later referred to as “the history of tradition.” In this way, he approached the text as an ancient finding and heritage of the past from which tangible data could be drawn.

This approach, however, the purpose of which was to reconstruct the original shape of this cultural inheritance, was not substantially sufficient to fill the gaps in the tradition. In response, the humanists compiled a diverse range of interpretative systems to tackle this issue. One example is the *Castigationes Pliniana*e by Ermolao Barbaro (1454–1493), who drew analogies with the world around him, especially when explaining naturalistic items, in order to compensate for the general lack of knowledge of these matters at the time. This comparison became a necessary means adopted by scholarship in many fields in order to comprehend the ancient universe through known and controllable parameters.

In parallel, encyclopedic treatises started to flourish. Even if Biondo’s works, the *Elegantiae* by Lorenzo Valla (1405–1457) and the *Orthographia* by Giovanni Tortelli (1400–1466) could be recognized as a significant prefiguration of this genre in an antiquarian perspective; a mature expression of Renaissance antiquarian encyclopedism can be found only later, in Giorgio Valla’s (1447–1500) *De expetendis et fugiendis rebus opus*, Raffaele Maffei’s (1451–1522) *Commentaria rerum Urbanarum*, Alessandro Alessandri’s (1461–1523) *Dies geniales*, and

Celio Rodigino's (1469–1525) *Antiquae lectiones*. These treatises attempted to approach the ancient world from a universal perspective, cross-referencing different literary and material sources, trying to provide a complex idea of history.

The idea that history resided in ancient findings and that, through these ancient findings, history still maintained its vitality in the present sparked the research of material evidence to the indiscriminate action of counterfeiters. Forgeries were created for the purpose of supporting positions that lacked reliable data; and the frequent attempts to unmask their mendacious nature, at times in vain, represented one of the crucial aspects of the antiquarian investigation. By rejecting the authenticity of the *Donation of Constantine*, Lorenzo Valla (1406–1457) gave impetus to the unmasking of falsifications. Having rejected a testimony which had been trusted during the Middle Ages, he clearly demonstrated how the new vision of sources in their material consistency marked a change in thinking. Among the most famous antiquarian counterfeiters were Annius of Viterbo (1437–1502) and Alfonso Ceccarelli (1532–1583). The works of Annius became very popular: he produced literary and epigraphic apocryphal texts (Berosus, Fabius Pictor, Cato, the *Decretum Desiderii*) in order to offer a new cabalistic and esoteric reading of the history of civilization that had been handed down directly from Hebrew and Etruscan sources. The extensive work of Ceccarelli, which remained predominantly in manuscript form, was put to use in genealogical and historiographical studies.

Antiquarian studies were conducted in humanistic circles, the most famous of which was the Academia Romana of Giulio Pomponio Leto (1428–1498); figures as Bartolomeo Platina (1421–1481) and Niccolò Perotti (1430–1480) frequently participated in its sessions. The humanist inclination of this circle and its desire to “revive” antiquity triggered an interest in ancient sources, the rediscovery and publication of manuscripts (one of the most important cases being the unearthing the *Codex Farnesianus* of Festus), the study of material findings (inscriptions, coins,

statues, etc.), the research into institutional and social history, and the customs of ancient Rome.

One of the heirs to this cultural experience was Angelo Colocci (1474–1549), who continued this intellectual circle at Horti Sallustiani, where antiquarian interests flourished. Among the participants, Baldassarre Castiglione (1478–1529), Giovanni Pierio Valeriano (1477–1558), and Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), in particular, are worthy of mention. The presence of the three humanists, Bembo, Valeriano, and Colocci confirms that the antiquarian perspective was carried out in parallel with the historical-linguistic theories debated at the time and had a tangible effect on them. Its impact on the works of Theodore Bibliander (1506–1564) and Joachim Péron (1498–1559) is clear from *De ratione communi omnium linguarum et litterarum commentarius* and *Dialogorum de linguae Gallicae origine, eiusque cum Graeca cognatione*, respectively.

Between the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century, antiquarian studies gradually became inextricably linked with collections of antiquities. Although important private collections also existed, the main collections of antiquities built up during the Renaissance were owned by the political and ecclesiastical aristocracy and were often connected to the royal courts. This created a close bond, often of subordination, between antiquarian erudition and power, putting the first at the service of the second. Beyond the political interference that may have taken place, the most important antiquarian works of the sixteenth century emanated from the richest and most heterogeneous collections, such as those which belonged to the Farnese family in Rome, to the Medici in Florence, to the Este in Ferrara, or to the Palatine collection in Vienna and the royal collection in Madrid.

Many erudite works flourished within these environments. These included, for example, the philological and numismatic investigations carried out by Antonio Agustín (1517–1586) and Fulvio Orsini (1529–1600), the ecclesiastical and juridical enquiries by Onofrio Panvinio (1530–1568), and the extensive antiquarian encyclopedia written by Pirro Ligorio (1513–1583), which all benefited from the vitality of the

Roman environment. The philological studies on classical texts conducted by Piero Vettori (1499–1585) and the antiquarian studies by Vincenzo Borghini (1515–1580) were deeply rooted in the Florentine context, and the mythographic studies of Lilio Gregorio Giraldi (1479–1552) and Agostino Mosti (1505–1584) were firmly based in the culture of the Ferrarese court. Austria and Spain were also fertile grounds for the works of Wolfgang Lazius (1514–1565) and Jeronimo Zurita (1512–1580), respectively.

The connection to the political power of the time permitted the antiquarian investigation to break free from the closed circles of collections and libraries and to be disseminated into the collective imagination, thereby developing into one of the columns of the triumphant Renaissance. When planning their works, it was common practice for artists and architects to receive support from antiquarian scholars, who took on the role of iconographic advisors and enhanced the conceptual coherence of the patron's projects. Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) was supported by Borghini when decorating the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, the Zuccari brothers by Orsini or Panvinio for the Palazzo Farnese in Caprarola, and Rosso Fiorentino (1495–1540) by a figure who remains anonymous for the Gallery of Francis I in Fontainebleau (probably Lazare de Baïf); more rarely, the same artist took on the role of iconographer, and this was perhaps the case with Jacopo Zucchi (1542–1596).

In artistic contexts, it was possible for a stylistic feature of antiquarian origin to enter into standard decorative schemes, so that it was difficult to distinguish between the reuse of classical elements and a voluntary or unconscious citation: this was especially the case with grotesques, which became commonplace after their rediscovery in the Domus Aurea (1479 ca.) and provoked a debate about their legitimacy and whether they should be subject to censorship. Anton Francesco Doni (1513–1574), Francisco de Hollanda (1517–1585), and Gabriele Paleotti (1522–1597), among others, were prominent in these disputes.

The fundamental role played by architecture underwent a revival in the development of the

Renaissance antiquarian spirit. After the fifteenth century, this took the form of evocations inspired by classical buildings; and during the sixteenth century, several treatises attempted to provide a more precise and complex codification of classical architecture. Sebastiano Serlio (1475–1554), Paolo Giovio (1483–1552), Guillaume Philandrier (1505–1563), and Claudio Tolomei's (1492–1556) *Accademia dei Virtuosi*, Daniele Barbaro (1514–1570), Jacques Androuet du Cerceau (1515–1585), and, perhaps most importantly, Andrea Palladio (1508–1580) combined the study of Vitruvius with practical knowledge, paving the way for a time of deeply rooted classicism.

Another form of antiquarianism in Renaissance cultural life can be seen in the *impresa*. This genre, which was inspired by emblems, combined images and short texts (usually a motto), often reutilizing erudite elements of the antiquarian investigation and related them to the addressee. Starting with Andrea Alciati (1492–1550), who was the first to codify this “figurative literature,” a widespread editorial phenomenon took place involving scholars from all over Europe, including Girolamo Ruscelli (1518–1566), János Zsámboky (1531–1584), and Jean Jacques Boissard (1528–1602). The most famous motto of the Renaissance was *festina lente*, most commonly presented as an anchor and a dolphin. Originally, this figuration was minted on the reverse side of a coin of the Roman imperial series of Augustus and Titus. The image and the adage were represented and cited in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499), adopted by Aldo Manuzio (1449–1515) as the symbol for his publishing house; they were explained in their original sense by Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) in his *Adagia* and reinvented by Cosimo I de' Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany in his *impresa*.

The rediscovery of the *Fasti Consulares* in the Roman Forum (1546) was a pivotal moment in the growth of the entire antiquarian movement. This epigraphic finding was transferred to the Capitulum under the supervision of Michelangelo. The edition of the text transmitted in these inscriptions triggered a debate among the experts

of epigraphy and chronology, in particular Bartolomeo Marliani (1487–1566), Francesco Robortello (1516–1577), Carlo Sigonio (1520–1584), Panvinio, Martin Smetius (1525–1578), and Stephen Winand Pigge (1520–1604), who all published it within a few years of each other. The major contribution to antiquarian scholarship provided by this finding was that it represented a new source for ancient Roman chronology, which until then had been known only through literary histories, and represented an official document directly connected to Roman imperial institutions. Previously, Roman chronology had often been reconstructed by comparing Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (whose accounts often contradicted each other), as demonstrated by the Roman chronotaxes of Gregorius Haloander (1501–1531), Johannes Cuspinianus (1473–1529), and Heinrich Glareanus (1488–1563).

The number of findings from classical antiquity was higher in Italy than the rest of Europe. And, although many humanists of other nations travelled to and resided for long periods in Italy, it was not possible for everyone to directly access a wide range of ancient findings. Nonetheless, antiquarian understanding had developed in the rest of Europe by the mid-fifteenth century and gradually strengthened to the point where Italy's leading position in governing this area of knowledge was challenged.

One of the earliest examples of this circulation of ideas is represented by the arrival in Germany of a partial copy of the *Commentaria* of Ciriaco d'Ancona, brought by Hartmann Schedel (1440–1514), which had a significant influence on the compilation of Peter Apian's (1495–1552) epigraphic collection and some of the later works of Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). Furthermore, Jacopo Strada's (1507–1588) arrangement of his own *Magnum ac Novum Opus* for the Fugger bankers demonstrated how antiquarian culture passed across the Alps. And the studies on Roman antiquity conducted by Johann Roszfeld (1550–1626) clearly revealed the impact of this tradition on learned German milieus.

In France, the growth of antiquarian scholarship was encouraged by King Francis I and by the circle of humanists who gravitated around him. The studies of Guillaume Budé (1468–1540), who was an ambassador to Rome, and the journeys he made to Italy helped him amass a weight of numismatic knowledge that led to the publication of the most important Renaissance metrological treatise, *De asse*. The research carried out by Lazare de Baif (1496–1547) was also crucial; he was an ambassador to Venice, from where he sent several antiquities to his homeland, and arranged for innovative antiquarian investigations to be carried out on clothing, vases, and vessels. Guillaume Du Choul (1496–1560) investigated several aspects of Roman religion by cross-referencing material and literary sources. Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609) demonstrated his antiquarian scholarship in his editing of ancient authors and his work on historical chronology.

Antiquarian erudition was also practiced at the highest level in the Low Countries. Hubert Goltzius (1526–1583), one of the most famous numismatists of the second half of the sixteenth century, developed his scholarship while travelling from the Netherlands to Italy: the purpose of his publications was to reconstruct the history of the Roman Empire by drawing links between ancient coins and inscriptions and their related narrative sources. Justus Lipsius (1547–1606), who spent part of his life in Rome, investigated many aspects of classical and biblical antiquity, including banqueting, polioretica, the real nature of the Christian cross, and more complex analyses of Roman civilization. Even though his focus was mainly philological in nature, Lipsius often used material findings to carry out his emendations and corrections of ancient texts; his *Antiquae lectiones* provide a clear example of this methodological approach. The long journey through Italy completed by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) also contributed significantly to antiquarian scholarship: he was a learned painter, and it has been proved that his drawings of statues and ruins increased the knowledge on the material bequest of antiquity, thanks also to the help of his brother Philip (1574–1611) and his son Albert (1614–1657).

The main means through which antiquarianism became a continental phenomenon was the circulation of published books. The philological editions of ancient authors and historiographical texts, especially if they included images, had a significant positive effect on the understanding of indirect records. In this way, the knowledge acquired in Italy was made available to the rest of the European humanist community, allowing research to be undertaken where findings were missing. The works of Antoine Lafréry (1512–1577) and Giovanni Battista de' Cavalieri (1525–1601) are worthy of mention in this context.

Antiquarian surveys also included national investigations, the purpose of which was to reconstruct a reliable history for a specific territory, following the model of the studies undertaken on Roman antiquity. Therefore, by comparing local literary sources with local ruins, it was possible to give a new shape to the origins of (i) France, described, for example, in the works of Pierre Pithou (1539–1596); (ii) England, investigated by William Camden's (1551–1623) *Britannia*; (iii) Germany, studied in Johan Månsson's (1488–1544) and Philipp Clüver's (1580–1622) treatises; and (iv) Spain, researched by Zurita's and Francisco Padilla's (1527–1607). In the same period, the Polish scholar Jan Łasicki (1534–1602) attempted to complete the first erudite history of Russia, while histories of the Turkish Empire, China, and the New World, contaminating travel literature with antiquarian accounts, also flourished.

The hypothesis that there was a relationship between the triumph of antiquarian culture and the explosion of religious controversies in Northern Europe is very interesting, especially given the impact of the Reformed Approach to sacred scriptures on spiritual life. For example, the New Testamentary Commentary of Erasmus could have taken advantage of the experience acquired in his antiquarian publications. As one would expect, humanists and theologians (Catholic and Protestant alike) used antiquarianism to support their own positions and contest opposing views. The *Magdeburg Centuries*, which was overseen by Matija Vlačić (1520–1575), represented the

high point for Protestant antiquarian writings and breathed life into a constellation of analogous works by authors such as Matthew Parker (1504–1575), Johan Jakob Gryner (1540–1617) and Johann Wilhelm Stucki (1542–1607). On the Catholic side, the most complete and organized response is represented by the *Annales* of Cesare Baronio (1538–1607), the purpose of which was not only to rehabilitate the Roman vision of Christianity from a historiographic perspective but also to utilize a more precise and systematic antiquarian approach. These patterns remained popular for most of the seventeenth century, as demonstrated by the monumental *Roma Sotterranea* written by Antonio Bosio (1575–1629), and *Italia Sacra* written by Ferdinando Ughelli (1595–1670).

Although the antiquarian tradition continued to generate very important successors during the centuries that followed, the turning point for Renaissance antiquarianism can be narrowed down to the early seventeenth century, when its unsuitability for dealing with new scientific enquiries started to become obvious. Hybrid figures who continued to tread the traditional path began to emerge, but they were unable to remain indifferent to the impending new developments. This was especially the case with the medical, zoological, and botanical studies carried out by Conrad Gesner (1516–1565), Girolamo Mercuriale (1530–1606), Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605), and Giovanni Battista della Porta (1535–1615) and most of all with the astronomical and scientific investigations of Nicolas Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637) and Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655). There are, however, two dates in particular which encapsulate this moment of transition: 1620, the year in which Francis Bacon (1561–1626) published his *Novum Organum*, and 1637, the year René Descartes' (1596–1650) *Discours de la méthode* was published. The emerging empiricism of evidence-based enquiry and philosophical skepticism started undermining the reliability of the antiquarian investigation, questioning the nature of the source and hence the value of the method, and this, in turn, opened the way to a new phase in the development of knowledge on the path to modernity.

## Methodology

In antiquarian studies, the source began to take on a central role in the entire intellectual system and became the key aspect to consider when searching for knowledge about the past, thereby exerting an influence on the hermeneutical approach. During the Renaissance, many scholars debated the practical applications of the antiquarian methodology. Beyond specific objects of study, antiquarian techniques generally converged on a dual scheme which included a cataloguing phase and an interpretative phase. A large number of records had to be compiled (both directly and indirectly) in order to create a solid foundation; the records were then divided into different categories – in which the formal, geographical, political, and typological parameters were considered. After this descriptive stage, a process of amalgamation took place, which involved the cross-referencing of the data according to its common or distinctive elements, thereby establishing links with its cultural context in the process. The aim was for the interpretation of each finding to be grounded in the comprehension of its morphology, and these records were mainly used to fill gaps in knowledge, providing a plausible reconstruction through analogy.

Personal observation (*autopsia*) became essential in order to ascertain the reliability of the antiquarian method and allowed other scholars to verify evidence or findings. It was no longer deemed sufficient to rely on texts that simply referred to an issue – it became necessary to elicit primary information and examine the works and pieces that developed around it. It was therefore important to study both primary and secondary sources, such as analogous treatises or commentaries, from a unitary perspective because they could provide further lost information.

Collections permitted antiquarian practice to be carried out widely. Thanks to the collections of ancient findings available, it was possible to carry out multidisciplinary excursions aimed at establishing the links between the different findings and the texts, transforming a general humanist interest in antiquity into a systematic approach to the subject. Although these collections cannot be identified with antiquarianism in and of

themselves, they are related to its basic premises. The purpose of antiquarianism instead lays in its capacity to make the data react with the cultural context from which it derived, utilizing new instruments to understand the stratification of meanings, where the links between witnesses and time could be found.

The antiquarian approach during the Renaissance enabled the past to acquire a tangible and measurable connotation which was identified through its remains. The “materialization” of the object of study transformed each finding into a “semiotic” vehicle of unexpected meanings. This progress is particularly meaningful in that it moved away from the literary world: the written form lost its oracular connotation thanks to the objectivation of the support (codex/finding) and medium (the language). This represented a fundamental breakthrough in Renaissance antiquarian erudition: the awareness of the equivalence of sources. This equivalence was based on general categories which were subordinated to specific approaches. It was possible to obtain meaningful data from manuscripts, inscriptions, coins, statues, and the like due to the endeavors made in each specific discipline: philology, epigraphy, numismatics, archaeology, iconography, etc. For each field, the findings were ranked according to their reliability (the most consistent manuscripts, the most relevant inscriptions, the best-preserved coins, etc.).

It was from this awareness that efforts were made, commencing with the collation of manuscripts, then associating of different pieces of material evidence to confirm the existence of a historical fact, and finally evaluating of data from different and ostensibly incompatible cultural areas. This also resulted in parallels being drawn between the past and present. For example, by using descriptions from ancient sources, it was possible to compare geographical places with their modern circumstances and characteristics. Different linguistic domains (ancient languages vs. current vernaculars) could also be compared in order to explain the lost meanings of words and expressions.

It is therefore clear that the convergence of disciplines in the antiquarian method derived



from the interaction of specific and coherent methodologies, which ultimately modified the conformation of the entire system. The advances of one method derived from the advances of others, but only progressively, and it was understood that all were part of the same whole. The reconstruction of the past (or the idea of the past) depended on the relationship between the plethora of aspects linked to a source and to the phenomena that occurred within the history of tradition.

Through conjecture, hypotheses were formulated on the basis of the remains for the purpose of restoring their original status, which required a theoretical cognition of their essence. This was founded on the philological principle of respecting the “text/object” as handed down, which was the precondition for any amendment or modification. This meant that the criteria of emendation (*emendatio*) had to be applied to the explanation (*explicatio*): clarifying the nature of a source through its tradition, i.e., the recovery of a reliable lesson (*accuratam lectionem*), also became essential for its interpretation (*lectionem utilem*).

The relationship between documentary voids and hypotheses of reconstruction emerged: all the lacunas could potentially be filled because they were part of a “cultural grammar,” the rules of which were deduced through antiquarian investigation. The illusion of a coherent reconstruction of the heritage of the ancients became the foundation for the construction of a culture of the present in a universal perspective, rooted in the remains of a past perceived as incomplete but also solid in its material substance.

Scholars were encouraged to draw a distinction between their conjectures and hypothetic reconstructions, on the one hand, and the data transmitted, on the other. Only in this way was it possible to preserve the integrity of the tradition without contaminating the evidence and to allow future scholars to solve the problems which they faced.

Ignoring the origins of remains often not only opened the door to a new layer of corruption of tradition but also represented the limits beyond which it was not possible to push forward conjecture in all of its forms: the “void of knowledge” was considered somehow to be a starting point for the research to be undertaken. This focus on

rejecting or accepting conjectures reinforced respect for tradition: the preferred solution was to adopt the “principle of authority,” defending the stability of tradition rather than accepting positions that could have potentially undermined the legacy of knowledge. At the same time, there were also scholars who claimed that real progress could only be achieved in antiquarian studies if new discoveries were made, pointing to the limits of the *auctoritas* and the lack of canonical sources.

This also implied the possibility of a credible reconstruction of the matter using external arguments (*argumenta*). In order to obtain a thorough comprehension of remains without omitting the complex weave of meanings involved, it was necessary to examine their connection to their historical background. Although these endeavors occasionally did not reap any rewards, they remained a mandatory stage of the investigation in that they examined a context from which it was possible to glean parallel or additional information. Contradictory data emerged from this process, a problem that encouraged the development of alternative solutions to preserve the coherence of the entire system.

In this phase, the concept of “error” (or the “nature of errors”) became a further instrument to be used in understanding sources more fully. It was hypothesized that the persistence of errors in the tradition was due to those who physically assembled the object analyzed. This permitted a distinction to be made between the identity of the “author” (the creator) and the “maker” (a scribe, an engraver, a sculptor – but sometimes also the author), admitting the possibility of an unintentional fallacy despite the authority and antiquity being known. This distinction opened new perspectives: the admission that the error was potentially common to any type of writing, and hence to any type of communication, went straight to the core of the problem, i.e., the hand of the writer, as opposed to the surface on which the wording was written.

This represented the first emergence of the awareness that all the data deriving from sources could be influenced by several variables, which had to be understood in order to fully grasp the

subject matter being studied. The source was considered to be influenced by contingencies (e.g., the social or economic status of the executor), implying that quantitative differences did not necessarily correspond to qualitative dynamics (e.g., if the errors were more frequently found in manuscripts or epigraphs).

This implied that all types of writing were governed by similar mechanisms, fostering the understanding of the two laws that influenced its morphology: norm and usage. All the potential fluctuations within these factors should be taken into account, with each specific occurrence assessed in accordance with diatopic (based on geographical place) diachronic (based on time), and diastratic (based on social, cultural, and educational factors) parameters.

## Definition

The intellectual phenomenon of Renaissance antiquarianism developed throughout Europe, manifesting itself in a plurality of works influenced by the origin, the environment and the personal approach of each author, the language adopted, the publishing house involved, and the commissioner. These works were related to a multitude of disciplines, which can be broadly identified by following the setup of Poliziano's *Panepistemon* (1491). The production of antiquarian works reached its peak during and after the mid-sixteenth century, a period when antiquarianism transitioned from a phase of growth and consolidation to maturity, and the advancements made in previous centuries were systemically classified and widely utilized.

Antiquarian interests can be divided into two key areas, both of which connect all derivative disciplines: the first could be defined as "orthographic," in which the material finding transmitted a written witness, in any form, and in a variety of languages, and the second as "iconographic," in which the investigation was based exclusively on the morphological aspect, beyond the linguistic factor. It was inevitable that these two contexts would be complementary and that they went hand in hand, mutually benefiting from their respective

development. From here, different disciplines emerged, each with its own peculiarities, passing from the literary to the artistic to the scientific and many other areas of enquiry, and each with clearly defined cultural horizons.

The antiquarian writings of the Renaissance were generally categorized according to three models: miscellanies of scattered records, organic works which often contained an encyclopedic in compass, and monographs. In the first case, these works contained explanations of a plurality of misinterpreted or misunderstood passages referring to the antiquarian corpus in the broadest sense, frequently with the title of *Variae* or *Antiquae lectiones*. The works in the second case, on the other hand, were comprised of systematic expositions of antiquarian themes or topics that also took related contexts into consideration, thereby significantly widening the possible implications of a single study. In the third case, surveys on specific topics were carried out.

Therefore, Renaissance antiquarianism can be defined as a cultural phenomenon aiming at interpreting the past by cross-referencing heterogeneous sources thanks to accumulation and collection. This entailed the use of new investigative techniques which involved the combination of literary sources and material findings in order to provide a reliable foundation for the idea of history. However, Renaissance antiquarianism must not be reduced to the mere collecting, nor can it be condensed to an intellectual interest or a general fascination with antiquity. It is reasonable to assume that Renaissance antiquarianism first emerged from the study of the classical world, but it eventually evolved beyond these boundaries to become a method of approaching an object of study rather than simply a discipline. Since the universality of the method became potentially applicable to all fields and times, its essence was manifested in the methodological pathway and perspective applied. In fact, the broadening of the sources from which it was possible to obtain historical data triggered the development of competencies and interpretative instruments, which allowed the identification of evidence from an array of objects of study. From this, it can be seen that Renaissance antiquarianism represented

a methodological perspective, the purpose of which was to rethink the way the past was viewed through a critical analysis of sources, producing a renewed approach toward history, which stimulated the interaction of disciplines and influenced the intellectual life of the time.

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