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Review of Marrache-Gouraud, M. (2020) La Légende des Objects: le Cabinet de Curiosités réfléchi par son catalogue (Europe, XVIe-XVIIe siècles)

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come to animate not only politics but also religion, film and performance arts, giving rise to vibrant industries treated here on level terms with the luxury products of earlier periods. The author – himself responsible for addressing these latest cultural phenomena and for bringing them into the sphere of the British Museum on an equal basis with the antiquities – deserves all credit for championing the continuity of approach implicit in this treatment. Not only does it lend a logical coherence to the volume but it surely acknowledges that the collecting urge is as universal today as it always has been.

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Myriam Marrache-Gouraud, *La légende des objets: le cabinet de curiosités réfléchi par son catalogue (Europe, XVIe–XVIIIe siècles)*. Librairie Droz, Geneva, 2020. ISBN 978-2-600-06019-6. 628 pp., 52 b. & w. illus. €98.67

This is a daring, literary and literate study. It is long – some 600 pages – and it is, in essence, a book of many words about words. That is, it discusses and analyses the early modern catalogues that document the multitude of objects in European collections of curiosities. Here, therefore, neither the collections themselves nor the various objects that they comprised are the centre of attention, but the words and illustrations that describe them in their catalogues.

La légende des objets focuses primarily on printed catalogues, most of them published between 1565 – the year of Samuel Quiccheberg's well-known treatise on collecting – and the late seventeenth century, when various private collections entered public institutions. It ranges widely over European collections, especially those in France, Germany, Italy and the Low Countries, as is evident from the useful twelve-page appendix that presents a chronological survey by publication date of the catalogues studied. Eight of these (among them Giovio, Kentmann, the Calzolari family, Imperato, and Contant) were printed in the sixteenth century or the year 1600. Nearly all the others were

published in the seventeenth century, including further editions of the Contant and Calzolari catalogues, plus catalogues of the collections created by Basilius Besler in Nuremberg, Samuel Veyrel in Saintes, the Tradescants in London, Ole Worm and Thomas Bartholin in Copenhagen, Lodovico Moscardo in Verona, Manfredo Settala in Milan, Ferdinando Cospi in Bologna, Léonard Bernon in La Rochelle, Athanasius Kircher in Rome, the botanical garden in Leiden, and Frederik Ruysch in Amsterdam, to name but some.

Interest has been growing in recent years in documentation systems, lists, tables, recording in text and image, cataloguing, classifying, and archiving as crucial elements of the practices of science, scholarship and collecting. From instruments and sources to be critically analysed and used, they have become subjects in their own right. Marrache-Gouraud's innovative monograph forms part of this trend, but has its own identity and approach, influenced by both the Anglo-Saxon historiographical tradition (represented by, for instance, Paula Findlen, Ann Blair, Lorraine Daston, Lisa Jardine, Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor) and French literary history, philosophy and works on collections (for example, by Jean Céard, Michel Foucault, Krzysztof Pomian, Marie-Élisabeth Boutroue, Frank Lestringant, Isabelle Pantin, and Patricia Falguières).

A key aspect of Marrache-Gouraud's approach is that words take on a certain materiality. She interrogates and analyses historical terms in their manifestations as names, concepts, lists, tables, or descriptions, and she studies whole catalogues as the material that actually creates and brings to life early modern collections of curious objects. This is not a metaphorical statement. These curiosity collections would have disappeared into oblivion, she argues, without the specific words of these printed catalogues, their careful organization and editorial strategies, their well-thought-out formats and their terminology and language, which circle around the themes of spectacle and theatre. These catalogues are – and were at the time – crucial to the knowledge of such collections, but they present their respective subjects by means of a verbal theatricalization, while their illustrations invite the reader-viewer to step into a spatial equivalent. Marrache-Gouraud also questions, however, the extent to which two-dimensional words on pages can ever convey to the reader the experience of a visit to

such collections of marvellous objects. The author characterizes her work as a study of 'the poetics of curiosity in the space of catalogues' and those catalogues themselves as a phenomenon somewhere between a *lieu de mémoire* and a homage to the bizarre. As sources, they are, at the same time, among the earliest forms of paper documentation regarding our museum collections.

Marrache-Gouraud divides her clearly organized monograph into two main segments. The first ('The Book and the Collection') concentrates on the creation of such catalogues, and on the question of how these differ from items such as inventory lists or anthologies. When and why were the catalogues created, for what kind of readership, what functions did they have – not least in terms of the self-presentation of the collector – and what can the choice to use a vernacular or Latin as the principal language tell us about the maker's intentions? What kind of vocabularies and languages are used and how are items named? How were illustrations chosen and what are the connections between text and images? How do, for instance, biblical language, non-European languages, or the rhetorics of commerce function when applied to curious objects? These are some of the main elements of what Marrache-Gouraud calls the 'meta-language of curiosity'.

Catalogues tend to fix a collection at a certain moment in time, while the collections themselves may expand, shrink, and ultimately disintegrate. The very existence of multiple editions shows how some author-collectors tried to keep up with change over time. Marrache-Gouraud pays much attention to those who produced such catalogues and to how these publications were instrumental in projecting their self-image and establishing their status, not only by the fact that the works were published in the first place but also by the choice of format, illustrations, language and paratexts. Somewhat less is said about the actual readership and the uses of such volumes.

Throughout her monograph, illuminating lexicographic discussions can be found of the terminology used for these collections (for example, museum, cabinet, theatre, *Kunstkammer*) and of the development, especially from the 1560s, of a more specialized vocabulary for curiosity collections. Interestingly, the term 'cabinet de curiosité' appears only very late in her sources, in 1642, and in the context of Fontainebleau.

By then, as she argues, that particular collection was actually in a phase of decline, while curiosity cabinets had become such a common phenomenon that they were hardly objects of curiosity any longer.

The second segment of the work ('Writing Curiously') consists of a close study of the fabric of the texts of these catalogues, an ambitious attempt to discover whether something existed that could be called 'un "style" curieux'. Marrache-Gouraud examines various modes of description and reporting that range from apparently bare and basic lists and enumerations to anecdotes and lengthy 'histoires prodigieuses'. None is self-evident; all are functional but also have aesthetic effects. In this second part, methods of literary analysis come to the fore. Here we find fascinating discussions of how certain words and phrasings help to authenticate objects, of the language of monstrosity and that of observation and verification – in particular where curious *naturalia* and distant lands were concerned – but also analyses of the functions and forms of storytelling and anecdotes in the context of a catalogue. An important section highlights the necessity of not taking *description* as self-evident in the discourse of curiosity, and Marrache-Gouraud goes deeply into three modes of description: ekphrasis or vivid description; *docere* or the process of instructing; and *move*, appealing to an emotional, often aesthetic response.

Her long discussion of lists, their forms and functions, is equally stimulating. Paying attention to their visual forms and rhythmic characteristics, she looks at them as open-ended structures, but also as attempts to follow the order of the objects in a collection or to impose a new order, new classifications and hierarchies. The variety is enormous: some lists group items by the four elements, others by the six days of Creation; yet others create a taxonomy based on observation, or organize items alphabetically. Some lists are related to commonplace notation systems. Some use numbering and brackets for grouping. Lists, as Marrache-Gouraud argues, perform a double movement, fragmenting and then recomposing a collection. They show and demonstrate, but are also evidence of a search for coherence beyond diversity.

I have tried to sketch the main outlines and give some examples of the contents of this fascinating monograph, but it is quite impossible to do justice here to its riches and to the enormous range of

subjects and themes it discusses. It is a major contribution to an aspect of the history of collections that is in development and that connects the history of curiosity collections, book and literary history, and the history of documentation itself. It is not an easy work to read: it is sometimes repetitive and often dense, but it is well worth the effort and deserves a wide readership beyond the French-speaking world.

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Heikki Solin, *Da Rodolfo Pio ai Farnese: Storia di due collezioni epigrafiche urbane*, Commentationes Humanarum Literarum 141. Helsinki, Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 2021. ISBN 978-951-653-465-0 (print), 978-951-653-466-7 (online). 436 pp., 5 col. illus., 3 b. & w. illus. €35 (print), open access (online).

It remains strange to modern eyes that the most thoroughly documented antiquities in early modern Italian collections – and probably the most thoroughly documented objects of any type – are classical inscriptions. In corners of museums today, Roman grave-stones and dedications can seem unprepossessing and without obvious aesthetic value. To a select group of Renaissance humanists however, they were a source of fascination. These scholars eagerly copied the texts they saw, which they recognized as documentary relics from the ancient world, and alongside those texts they often recorded details of where the objects had been found, who owned them, and where they were displayed. A stream of erudite visitors to Rome, in particular, made detailed records of what they encountered. Together, these compilations allow us to construct object biographies of individual inscriptions that are often overlooked in the travel accounts, wills and inventories more familiar to historians of collecting.

Heikki Solin's new book demonstrates just how much we can learn from sources of this sort about the inscriptions in two contrasting Roman collections. One was compiled by Cardinal Rodolfo Pio da Carpi

for his palace and *vigna* from the 1540s until his death in 1564, when it was quickly dispersed. The other was assembled by various members of the Farnese family, from the period of Paul III's papacy into the seventeenth century, and it absorbed most of the collection of the humanist Fulvio Orsini, who was a member of the Farnese court from 1553 until his death in 1600. This collection remained more or less intact, and was taken to Naples, where it now lies at the heart of the Museo Archeologico, although it is presented there among finds from elsewhere. Pio's collection included over 400 inscriptions but was relatively humble, made up of examples from Rome, some of which might otherwise have been destroyed; the Farnese inscriptions appeared alongside famous statues and paintings, and represented some of the most distinctive examples found in the sixteenth century. Crucially, both seem to have been open to erudite visitors, who recorded what they saw, and both became sites for admiration, discussion, and investigation.

By comparing the testimony of these visitors with inventories and with earlier and later records, Solin gives us a clear picture of how some inscriptions remained in situ and were forgotten as properties changed hands. Others had more distinction. Solin traces the path of the 'congio Farnese' (an inscribed bronze vase) from Paolo Emilio Cesi to Angelo Colocci, Alessandro Corvini, Achille Maffei and finally Ranuccio Farnese over twenty-five years in the mid-sixteenth century. The Farnese also had access to material excavated during the development of the Palatine and Forum in the late 1540s, material that they could keep for themselves or use as diplomatic gifts. Of five striking bases found near the arch of Septimius Severus, they took the three best, though the various records show that the bases initially remained in the Forum; of the two remaining, Pio got one and the other ended up in the Villa Giulia collection of Pope Julius III. While we get a sense of relative value, what these records do not give us are prices, so that we must look elsewhere for the grubby particulars of the antiquities market. We also do not always get a sense of how most sixteenth-century visitors would have classified the objects, which range from tiny, inscribed slabs to large monuments; as well as the 'congio', presumably valued less for its text than as a piece of ancient bronzework, Solin's catalogue of inscriptions includes the Hercules Farnese, because it features the signature of Glycon.