



# Winckelmann

MASTERPIECES THROUGHOUT THE  
VATICAN MUSEUMS



EDIZIONI MUSEI VATICANI

# Preface

“I have in mind a large work on the taste of the Greek artists...  
I will devote myself to one part of it for now and will address  
the Belvedere statues. I have already begun. This work so occupies  
me that, wherever I find myself, I can think of nothing else”.

(J.J. Winckelmann, letter to J.M. Francke, 20 March 1756)

At the conclusion of the many initiatives aimed at celebrating the figure of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, on the occasion of the centenaries which record his birth and tragic death (2017-2018), the Vatican Museums wanted to pay homage to the great Prussian with an exhibition which would highlight the pivotal role that the Vatican collections played in the famous German archaeologist's studies, theories and writings.

It was decided to do this in a diffused exhibition, which winds its way among the various different collections of antiquities: from the Egyptian to the Etruscan, Greek and Roman collections, but also among those universal works of Renaissance and Baroque art which played a substantial part in Winckelmann's interests.

*Winckelmann. Masterpieces throughout the Vatican Museums. Celebrations for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death*, a title which places the emphasis on that 1768, the year chosen as the keynote of this exhibition in memory of that sad 8 June in Trieste, which brought an end to so many ideas which the great scholar still had *in nuce*.

This catalogue, which I have the pleasure of introducing, is the result of a project coordinated by Claudia Valeri and Guido Cornini, in which the curators have been able to bring together the many aspects of this complex and enigmatic figure, involving colleagues from the various departments of the



Museums in a rewarding, in-depth study of Winckelmann in the Vatican. So, thank you to both of them, and especially to Claudia Valeri, for their enormous commitment: in this connection, I would also like recall the study day which she organised on the Montalto collection last May, which also formed part of these celebrations and their related vein of studies.

This lively catalogue, a product of the wish to make Winckelmann's work and ideas more widely known and understood, distils the analyses and interpretations undertaken by generations of scholars. The volume starts with a biographical profile of the German scholar skilfully compiled by Annavaleria Caffo. This *homo vagus et inconstans*, as he showed himself to be during his short life, was also a skilful strategist, acquiring acquaintances in high places who were of great value to his career (Cardinals Alberico Archinto, Domenico Passionei and Alessandro Albani among the many), but above all an intellectual capable, as few have been, of influencing future generations of the erudites and scholars, archaeologists and art historians, with his thought and writings. We could not ignore Winckelmann's place in the Roman context of those years; a cross-section of eighteenth-century Enlightenment Rome, *la République des lettres*, the free city where Winckelmann rightly and finally felt free (in that "civilised liberty which in other states is a shadow of what one enjoys in Rome"). Alessandra Rodolfo has highlighted the crucial role of the majestic collections of antiquities, where excavations were encouraged and astonishing rediscoveries made: the Eternal City so fascinated our scholar that he claimed, "it is impossible to write about antiquities without having been to Rome".

But for Winckelmann, Rome also meant the great minds of the past and grand collections of ancient art: from the *Giustiniani Gallery* to the works of Bellori and Santi Bartoli, and the activities of Francesco and Giuseppe Bianchini; it was also the Piranesian city of *Roman Antiquities* published the year after he arrived, or the *Capitoline Museum* by Giovanni Gaetano Bottari, in collaboration with Campiglia, the third volume of which came out in 1755, the very year in which Winckelmann experienced the City.

Many painters also lived and worked in Rome in the service of the Popes and the pontifical court, and Winckelmann formed close 'elective affinities' with them: we think of the bond with Anton Raphaël Mengs, and the Danish sculptor Johannes Wiedewelt, but must not underestimate the presence in those years of portraitists of the calibre of Pompeo Batoni, Pietro Nelli, and Domenico and Giuseppe Duprà. To these should be added Anton von Maron – who,



Hendrik Frans van Lint, *View of a Doric temple with a series of classical statues*, Rome, private collection

like Mengs, made a vivid portrait of Winckelmann which is now in Weimar – and Angelika Kauffmann, who left us a more introspective image of the scholar. Great topographical painters were also there, from Giovanni Paolo Pannini to Andrea Locatelli, from Jan Franz van Bloemen to the refined Hendrick van Lint, who painted modern Rome, though we must not forget the Rome of Claude's Arcadian landscapes scattered with statues, which evoked the grandeur of the past but also the antiquarian fervour of his contemporaries.

So the catalogue covers the Vatican collections, beginning with the Egyptian, which is here analysed by Mario Cappozzo who shows how the Winckelmann model makes extraordinary progress towards the scientific treatment of Egyptian art, based on iconographic, chronological and stylistic parameters. In their three-phase, and in some senses reductive, vision the Prussian's studies nevertheless constitute an excellent basis for those that followed and led to the creation in 1839 of the Gregorian Egyptian Museum.

The same can be said of Etruscan civilisation, for which Maurizio Sannibale has highlighted Winckelmann's key role in the methodologies of study and, above all, in the transition from antiquarianism to archaeology. In his idealised reconstruction, Winckelmann delineated certain distinctive features of Etruscan civilisation, recognising its founding values of liberty and of contact with other populations, which would have fostered the development of the arts. His brilliant, though selective, analysis of many features which would anticipate numerous subsequent studies, led in the following decades to the creation of the Gregorian Etruscan Museum (1836).

Eleonora Ferrazza has given us a contextual assessment of the *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, published in Dresden in 1764, a foundation stone in the history of European thought and reference point for all study of art history: she describes its fundamental structure, the tripartite scheme of 'growth, flourishing and decadence' in a hellenocentric vision typical of Winckelmann and his Neoplatonic aesthetic.

In contrast, Claudia Valeri addressed the complex topic of Winckelmann's cultural legacy, both of his writings, with the editions, reinterpretations, and manipulations of the *Geschichte*, but also and especially of the museographical operations which took place in the Vatican City during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, beginning with the sublime Clementine Museum (the future Pio-Clementine Museum) which opened in 1771, only three years after the scholar's death. As Rome's second public museum after the Capito-

line of 1733, it was planned from the start of Clement XIV's pontificate and brought to completion with the monumental structures of the Bevedere by Pius VI. His idea found an evolution in Ennio Quirino Visconti, the guiding spirit of that refined museographic reality founded on proposals put forward by Winckelmann. The German scholar's legacy was in fact taken up and intelligently managed by Visconti. He drew on its firm historical and philological preparation founded on the classics and the role of the artefact as primary source and tool for constructing history and artistic evolution. Thanks to the prominence given to it by publication as a means of reflection and pedagogy, Visconti, learning from Winckelmann, made further advances towards a reconstruction of the religious, political, and cultural history of the ancient world.

We could not deny a place to theories of restoration and the repair of ancient sculptures. This topic has been skilfully outlined by Giandomenico Spinola, summarising Winckelmann's thought in the light of the ideas which the Prussian developed by drawing on the writings of the Veronese Francesco Bianchini. And while Winckelmann's rigour derived from his inclination to philological purity, refusing to make use of uncertain additions, he was nevertheless much influenced by his Roman environment, which took a very different view: the world of the 'antiquaries' and the sculptor-restorers of the calibre of Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, his close friend during his Roman years and companion on his final journey, whose aim was to make reconstructions which would bring him the greatest profit.

And so Winckelmann's relationship with modern art, well summarised by Adele Breda, also enables us to grasp the formation of the scholar's aesthetic through his judgements, positive and negative, of the Vatican masterpieces: from Michelangelo to Raphael and the much criticised Caravaggio, passing on to the sublime Titian and Correggio.

Lastly, Claudia Lega has addressed Winckelmann's controversial relationship with the Vatican Library. She provides a detailed analysis of his fractious dealings with the institution, in spite of the high-ranking patrons he could boast of, and offers a vision of the "wayward and inconstant" character repelled by the idea of settling down to work on Greek codices or of doing any kind of routine work, but at the same time the refined scholar and sophisticated guide of notable Europeans visiting the City.

Thanks to the intercession of Cardinal Alessandro Albani, Winckelmann became Librarian to the Holy Roman Church and in 1761 succeeded in obtain-

ing the post of Academician of St Luke and, two years later, both the prestigious position of *Commissario* of the Antiquities in Rome and the longed-for title of *Scriptor linguae teutonicae* in the Vatican Library, though it fell short of the much desired appointment as *Scriptor linguae graecae*, which came only the year before his death, and only with the rank of *supranumerarius*. He also played an interesting role in the emerging *Profane Museum*, opened in 1761 by Clement XIII, for which he had the title of Curator, though jointly with Francesco Vettori, and it was not a clearly defined post among the *Roles* of the Vatican Library.

Following the various stages of a complex process, I would like first to express my thanks to His Eminence Cardinal Giuseppe Bertello President of the Council of the Vatican City, and His Excellence Mons. Fernando Vergez L.C., the Council's Secretary General, for understanding the importance of the initiative and having made its realisation possible through the adoption of some exceptional procedures.

Special thanks go to the Apostolic Library, in the persons of its Prefect, Mons. Cesare Pasini, and its Treasurer, Dr Amalia d'Alascio, for their customary generous collaboration, both in research and in loans of books for this initiative.

As always, I am grateful to our Publications Office, who have worked through the hot Roman summer to bring this catalogue to fruition on time and with their customary elegance and precision. Thanks therefore to Federico Di Cesare, with the crucial support of Cristina D'Andrea and Simona Tarantino, as well as Rosanna Di Pinto and Filippo Petrigiani from the Office for Pictures and Rights for their invaluable collaboration on the iconographic apparatus. Franco Mascioli deserves a special mention for having curated the graphical work and the pagination of the volume.

Particular thanks to Alessandra Murri for the graphical conception of the whole exhibition, skilfully interpreting the solutions conceived by the creative inspiration of the architect Roberto Pulitani who, from the 'little temple' of the Braccio Nuovo to the various ways he has exploited the other settings, has succeeded in making the works in the museum enter into dialogue with each other while at the same time highlighting their Winckelmannian legacy.

Lastly, I have pleasure in remembering the beautiful exhibition at the Capitoline Museum, *The Treasure of Antiquity: Winckelmann and the Capitoline Museum in eighteenth-century Rome*. Just as in that intelligent and successful ini-

tiative, Eloisa Doderò and Claudio Parisi Presicce and their colleagues wished to commemorate the relationship between Winckelmann and the Capitoline Museums, the attention which the scholar paid to the *Treasure of Antiquity*, so in this new project we want to focus, as I have already suggested, the attention of visitors to the Papal Museums to the happy and stimulating relationship he had with the extraordinary Vatican collections of art.

**Barbara Jatta**

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