

museografica, e l'evoluzione dei modelli teorici vallisneriani nei criteri d'organizzazione di tali materiali.

Il capitolo settimo avvia l'indagine verso una valutazione del ruolo svolto da Vallisneri nell'ambiente scientifico del suo tempo, attraverso un sottile disegno egemonico che non contrasta col principio collaborativo del progetto scientifico, di matrice baconiana.

A volte l'ansia eccessiva di completezza appesantisce i periodi, che si sarebbero forse potuti alleggerire con rielaborazioni e rimandi in un'articolazione complessiva del progetto editoriale.

Il lavoro nel suo complesso risulterà indispensabile a chiunque vorrà trattare in futuro di Antonio Vallisneri con cognizione di causa, anche a coloro i quali avvertissero l'esigenza di approfondirne analisi e speculazioni teoriche.

SONIA ZANIER

ARTHUR MACGREGOR, *Curiosity and Enlightenment. Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century*. London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007. 386 pp., ISBN 978030012493.

For an author whose publications range from swan rolls and beak markings to how to put the devil in a boot, the task of providing what he calls "a narrative in which some character can be given to the museum landscape as it evolved over its formative centuries" (p. ix) must have been a daunting one, raising above all the problem less of what to include than what to leave out. It is hard to imagine how a single author could write a comprehensive monographic work on the history and use of museums by now, and MacGregor is wise to resist the ambition of comprehensiveness in favour of judicious selection.

After a very brief survey of the ancient and medieval models and precursors, the second chapter contains a masterful survey

of the cabinet of curiosities, a subject already explored in depth in the classic 1985 collection of essays entitled *The Origins of Museums*. Characteristic of MacGregor's approach is the careful attention paid to how these cabinets can be interpreted from a number of viewpoints, the interplay between rival systems lying at the core of their intellectual appeal. This openness to a variety of interpretative approaches runs through the whole of the book: it explains, for example, the likelihood that a catalogue of a collection will fail to serve as a reliable guide to its physical arrangement, since the ambiguity of the latter could hardly be replicated in the linear arrangement of the former.

Since sculptures (and casts) and paintings were usually displayed in separate spaces until the nineteenth century – though there were exceptions, such as the Tribuna of the Uffizi –, the author deals with them in separate sections of chapter 3. The period covered here, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, was one in which the main flow of articles was from Italy into the collections of the British Isles, France, Spain, Germany and Austria, while display strategies oscillated between the aesthetic and the historical without the one entirely superseding the other.

The other chapters on this period range over a vast number of well known and less well known collections of objects from the natural world, scientific instruments, anatomical specimens and waxworks, and antiquities (Egypt, the Near East, prehistoric Europe, Greeks, Etruscans, Rome and its empire, the Middle Ages).

The final chapter presents a masterful panorama of the nineteenth-century museum that will surely provide the benchmark for years to come. The author wisely abstains from introducing fresh topics and revisits the museum types of the previous centuries in their new guises, thereby concluding the discussion of earlier themes.

Two features of the book as a whole deserve particular mention. One is the author's reluctance to take illustrations at face value. He points out that the "temple

of the Muses" seen in the background of the frontispiece to Mercati's *Metalloteca* is fictitious, and that the design of the cabinets in that frontispiece is different from that of other illustrations in the same text. Likewise, representations of Athanasius Kircher's museum as a vast vaulted hall would be hard to square with the dimensions of the College of Rome; one might add that the five obelisks 'placed like lightning-conductors' were in fact only one metre high. Such a critical attitude towards these representations is called for in the face of attempts that have been made to use them as faithful sources on which to base hypothetical reconstructions.

The other feature is the way in which, thanks to the author's presentation of both mainstream trends and their smaller tributaries, it becomes possible to trace unsuspected filiations across genres. Thus the simultaneous display of paintings and sculptures in the Tribuna of the Uffizi came to have an influence on displays in English country houses; the fascinating but little-known genre of the "wooden library", containing samples of different trees or shrubs, proves to combine art and science in its display techniques and in its combination of naturalia and artificialia; the National Portrait Gallery is already adumbrated in the collection of portraits of Paolo Giovio; and the work of Anne-Claude-Philippe de Caylus is shown to have introduced the methods of the natural science collection to the study of antiquities.

The example of Caylus might lead one to suppose a development *from* curiosity *to* enlightenment. But the juxtaposition of the two terms in the title of this book should be taken as a warning not to impose unilinear evolutionary patterns on such a multifarious phenomenon as the collection, and the author certainly cannot be accused of such oversimplifying.

It is more than a century since Sir David Murray's survey of the field was published. Given the volume of research devoted to collectors and collections at the present time, the contours of that field will be bound to change in the future. Early six-

teenth-century collecting in the Burgundian courts, the collections of the Iberian peninsula, are just two examples that will probably receive more attention in future publications. But *Curiosity and Enlightenment* will surely remain the major survey of the field for many years to come.

PETER MASON

OLE P. GRELL, ANDREW CUNNINGHAM, BERND ROECK (eds.), *Health Care and Poor Relief in 18<sup>th</sup> - and 19<sup>th</sup> - Century Southern Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. vi+326 pp., ISBN 0754651568.

The volume is the last in a series of four, published from 1997, exploring the issue of health care and poor relief through a series of comparative studies stretching across Europe and adopting a broad chronology (from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries). The editors hold that "the ways in which health care provisions and poor relief have been conceived and have been changed owed a great deal to the great confessional change brought about by the Protestant Reformation and its mirror-image movement... the Catholic Reformation", and that "there is a striking north/south difference, running precisely along the fissure between Protestantism in the North and renewed Catholicism in the South" (p. 3). The former view, once current, has been questioned in the previous decades, even though it is widely accepted that the "Catholic way" of adopting "a lesser evil for a common good" led to the creation of specific institutions, such as lay confraternities, the Foundling Hospital and the Monti di Pietà. As for the equation between Protestant and Catholic countries and Northern and Southern Europe, it is at least problematic.

The contributions to the volume are mainly centered on specific local contexts, thus showing a diversity and variety defying generalisation. Martin Scheutz deals with Austria, focusing on policies regarding the poor and insisting on the role played by

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