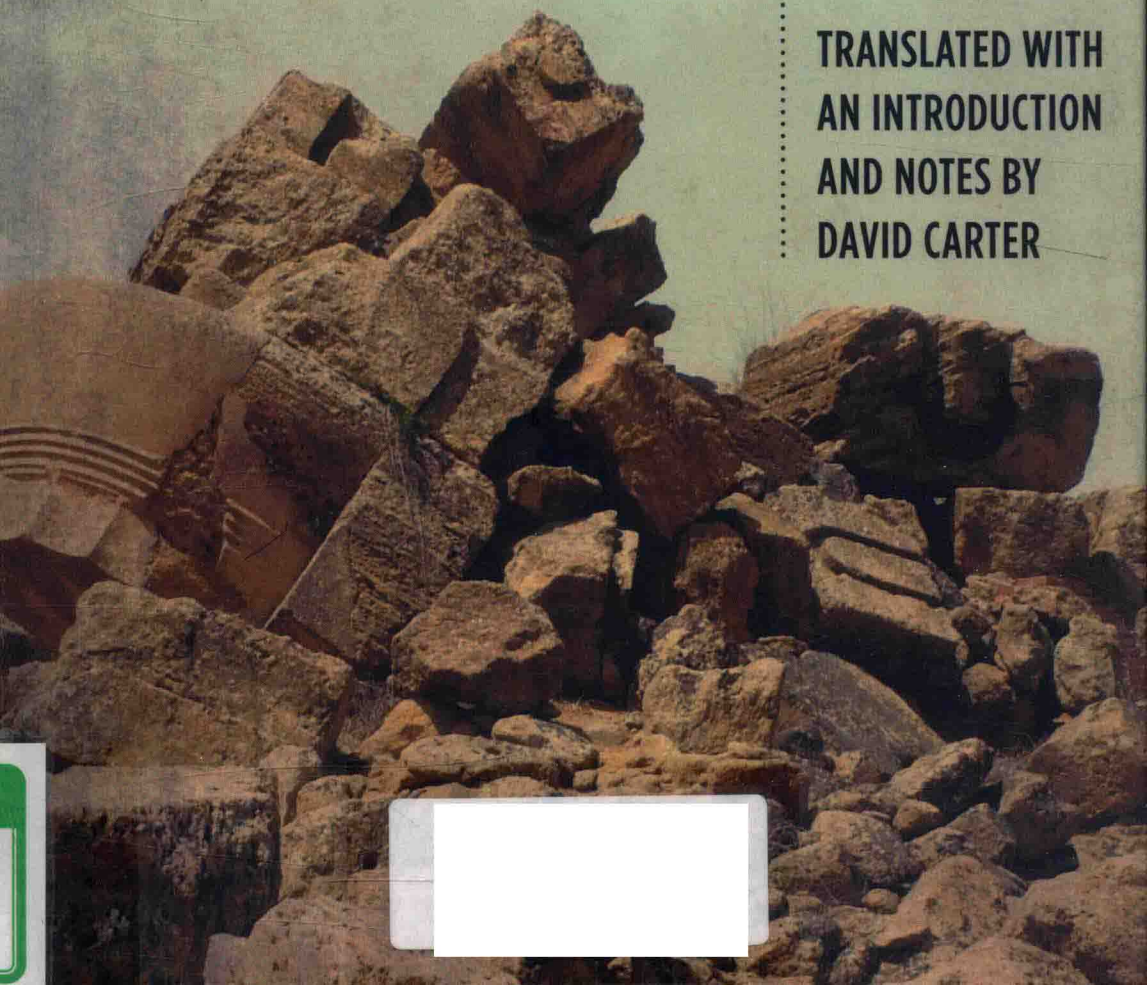


Johann Joachim Winckelmann on Art, Architecture, and Archaeology

TRANSLATED WITH
AN INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES BY
DAVID CARTER



Johann Joachim Winckelmann

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Rochester, New York

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Introduction

Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68) has long been recognized as a founder of modern methodologies in the fields of art history and archaeology. He also contributed considerably to studies of classical Greek architecture, and applied empirically derived categories of style to the analysis of classical works of art and architecture. He was also one of the first to undertake detailed empirical examinations of artifacts and describe them precisely in a way that enabled reasoned conclusions to be drawn and theories to be advanced about ancient societies and their cultures.¹

The present volume provides a selection of Winckelmann's essays ordered thematically, allowing the reader to discover his approaches to the study of classical Greek art, sculpture, and architecture as well as to his methodology in analyzing artifacts found at the site of the town of Herculaneum, buried, along with Pompeii and Stabiae, by the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79. The essays have been newly translated for this edition and are preceded in this introduction by a brief account of his life and works, including consideration of the circumstances of his murder, together with a consideration of some of the major influences of his writings. This account is followed by an assessment of his influence on his contemporaries and subsequent writers and artists. At the end of this introduction more detailed information is provided on the organization of the present volume and the principles that were followed in the translation and editing process.

Childhood and School

Johann Joachim Winckelmann was an only child, born on December 9, 1717, to the shoemaker Martin Winckelmann and his wife Anna Maria in the town of Stendal in an area known as the Altmark, now in the state of Saxony-Anhalt. The family lived in a very small thatched house, which was provided by his mother's side of the family. It consisted of basically one room, which served as living room, workplace, and display area for his father's goods. The parents probably slept in a small alcove and young Johann Joachim may have had his own small sleeping area.

Although their circumstances were very poor, Winckelmann's parents were determined to ensure that their son received a good education. After attending the primary school (*Grundschule*) from the age of five, it seems that he was accepted into the secondary level school, equivalent to

a grammar school (*Lateinschule*), when he was nine years old. In order to cover the costs of his studies Winckelmann's parents managed to get him into a special choir known as a "Kurrende" (from Latin "currere" meaning "to run around"). It was a traveling choir made up of poor pupils, who received some payment for their services. They were led by one of the older pupils and received payment for performing at weddings, funerals, and other events. In this way they could afford to pay for their school-books and did not have to pay for their tuition. Winckelmann was also very much helped by the support of the headmaster of the school, Esaias Wilhelm Tappert, who in 1732 appointed him his own personal assistant although he was only fifteen at the time. Tappert was almost totally blind and needed constant help. One of Winckelmann's main duties was to read aloud to him, and he was also put in charge of the school library, which enabled him to pursue his own reading extensively.

It became clear that Winckelmann had a gift for languages and was developing a love of books, so, in March 1735, when Winckelmann was only seventeen, Tappert arranged for him to attend the Cöllnisches Gymnasium in Berlin. Fortunately Tappert knew the headmaster of the Gymnasium, Friedrich Bake, very well, and Winckelmann was provided with accommodation in Bake's house, where he was also put in charge of the headmaster's own children. Winckelmann received a broader general education, including some natural science. He was particularly attracted to the course on Greek taught by the assistant headmaster, Christian Tobias. Despite his enthusiasm for this subject, it was not sufficient to earn him a favorable report when he left the Gymnasium in the autumn of 1736 to return to Stendal. The Rector described him in his report as "restless and inconstant." But Winckelmann did not let this deter him, and had himself registered at the Salzweder Gymnasium in order to perfect his knowledge of Greek. Here he was able to obtain the post of a teaching assistant. Little is known, however, about Winckelmann's activities in the next two years, before he went to university. A recent biographer, Wolfgang von Wangenheim, has indicated in his account of Winckelmann's life, entitled *Der verworfene Stein*, that nothing is known about his last days at school, about his relationships with his parents and friends during that time, nor about his whole period of puberty and confirmation.²

Student and Teacher

In April 1738, Winckelmann registered at the University of Halle as a student of theology. This was not out of any strong religious commitment. The theology faculty was the only one that was supported by both the state and the church and allowed children of poor families to attend without the necessity of paying student fees. It has been possible to determine which courses Winckelmann followed in Halle. Apart from courses

related to his theological studies he also attended lectures by a man who undoubtedly had great influence on his developing interest in the arts: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–62). Baumgarten was a philosopher who redefined the concept of aesthetics in a way in which we still use it today. Previously the term “aesthetic” had the general meaning of “relating to sensibility” or “responding to the stimulation of the senses,” but for Baumgarten aesthetics came to mean the study of good and bad taste, and was related to the judgment of what was beautiful. Good taste was the ability to judge what was beautiful by intuition and not through analysis by the intellect. Baumgarten hoped to develop nevertheless a science of aesthetics, the deduction of principles of both natural and artistic beauty based on a sense of good taste. His theories were very influential, though later they were strongly criticized by Immanuel Kant. One reason Winckelmann admired Baumgarten’s lectures was the wealth of literary knowledge they revealed. As he was already developing a strong interest in ancient cultures, he also attended the lectures of the philologist and medical expert Johann Heinrich Schulze (1687–1744). Schulze lectured on Greek and Roman antiquities, using illustrations from ancient coins. Numismatics was also to become an area of Winckelmann’s own expertise. When he finally left the university, in February 1740, it was with a report that described him as a student of average ability.

In the spring of 1740 he acquired a post in the service of a military man, the Colonel Georg Arnold von Grollmann in Osterburg, at that time a small town with a military barracks. His main duty was to teach history and philosophy to Grollmann’s eldest son. During this period Winckelmann also studied English, French, and Italian.

In May 1741 he entered the University of Jena, with the intention of studying geometry, medicine, and modern languages. He pursued his studies in medicine with considerable enthusiasm, though he soon lost interest in mathematics. He gave up his studies after barely a year without formally completing them.

In the spring of 1742 Winckelmann took another post as private tutor to Peter Lamprecht, the eldest son of the head clerk of the cathedral chapter in Hadmersleben, Christian Lamprecht, with the aim of preparing the boy for university. Winckelmann developed a strong affection for the boy, which was clearly homosexual in nature on Winckelmann’s side. The boy was fond of his teacher, too, though he could not return the affection with the same intensity. Winckelmann obtained the post of headmaster in the grammar school in Seehausen. Here, apart from his administrative duties, Winckelmann taught geography, logic, history, and the Greek, Latin, and Hebrew languages.

By this time, however, Winckelmann was feeling disenchanted with the cultural limitations of living in provincial circumstances. He sustained himself with his reading of whatever works of Greek literature he could

lay his hands on. Apart from his love for Homer, which dated from his school days, he also read works by Sophocles, Plato, Xenophon, and others, acquiring in the process an extensive knowledge of the history and culture of antiquity that would be indispensable to him in his later research. He studied long hours while also preparing his teaching for the school and for the young Lamprecht, whom he continued to tutor. For several years he continued thus, nursing the desire to leave Seehausen, until finally, in 1748, he was offered a post that enabled him to escape.

Schloss Nöthnitz and Dresden

The Reichsgraf Heinrich von Büнау had invited Winckelmann to take up the post of librarian at his castle, Schloss Nöthnitz, near Dresden. Winckelmann took up his duties there in September 1748. The library had one of the largest private collections in Germany. Büнау had transferred the library from Dresden to Nöthnitz in 1740, and had had it all catalogued at that time. It contained valuable editions from many countries of works of literature and natural science together with a large collection of journals. The prime task given to Winckelmann was collecting material for Büнау's planned extensive history of the German emperors. Apart from giving him the opportunity to learn about the methods of historical research, it also enabled Winckelmann to study many French and English works and volumes of engravings of ancient cultural objects.

While working for the Reichsgraf he was also able to visit the collection of paintings in the Dresden Gemäldegalerie, which held about 1,500 works at the time, most of them Italian from the seventeenth century. During this period he started writing his impressions of some of these paintings. The work was never completed but was published posthumously under the title *Description of the Most Excellent Paintings in the Dresden Gallery*. It is included in the present volume. In 1755 Winckelmann's first and very influential work was published, the *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and the Art of Sculpture*. Only fifty-odd copies were printed at first, but the next year, as word about it spread, it became necessary to run to a second printing. On this occasion Winckelmann took the opportunity of dealing with his critics in a unique way. In the second printing he included an attack on his work composed by himself under the title *Open Letter on Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and the Art of Sculpture*. This was followed, in the second printing, by a counter-attack also composed by himself, with the title *Explanation of Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and the Art of Sculpture; and Response to the Open Letter on these Thoughts*. All three essays are included as the first items in the present collection, followed by a short fragmentary piece he wrote sometime later during the

period 1756/57 entitled *More Mature Thoughts on the Imitation of the Ancients with Respect to Drawing and the Art of Sculpture*.

Dresden was at that time a major center for the arts and scholarship, and through his position as librarian in Schloss Nöthnitz Winckelmann came into contact with many leading cultural figures. Among them was the painter Adam Friedrich Oeser, with whom Winckelmann developed a close and lifelong friendship. Oeser became an influential figure, being appointed director of the Academy of Drawing, Painting, and Architecture in 1764 and finally Court Painter. When Winckelmann left the service of Bünau in October 1754, he moved to Dresden and lived with his friend. He learned much from Oeser: refining his artistic vision, broadening his understanding of artistic theory, as well as improving his skills as a draftsman.

Winckelmann was also able to study the collection of objects in the Dresden collection of Antiquities (Dresdner Antikensammlung), but not in the best circumstances. Not much care had been taken to display them to their best advantage: at first they were all put in the large garden of the main building, and then spread temporarily through four different pavilions. Winckelmann was later to describe many of the works as being “packed together like herrings” (in *Treatise on the Capacity for Sensitivity to the Beautiful in Art, and the Method of Teaching It*, of 1763, also included in the present volume).

Rome and Naples

Winckelmann had long desired to visit Rome, and his opportunity came when he met, at some time between 1748 and 1754 during his stay in Nöchnitz, the papal nuncio Count Alberigo Archinto, who was about to return to Rome to take up the post of governor of Rome. The nuncio was enthusiastic about converting Protestants to Catholicism, and for some time Winckelmann himself had been toying with the idea of adopting the Catholic faith. Little is certain about his motivation for the change, but there was considerable pressure on him to be converted. The members of the Saxon court at Dresden and its ruler King Augustus (1696–1763) were either all born Catholics or converts. And both the Jesuit priest Father Leo Rauch, who was royal confessor of the court chapel, and the papal nuncio assured him that only as a Catholic could he gain access to the antiquities stored in Rome. After a considerable struggle with his conscience, Winckelmann finally realized that it was the only way forward for him. He left it till the last minute and converted just before Archinto was about to leave for Rome in the summer of 1754. The nuncio wanted Winckelmann to follow him to Rome immediately, but Winckelmann delayed his departure several times, finally setting off in September 1755.

The journey took eight weeks, and he finally arrived in Rome on November 18, 1755. His plan initially was to stay for two years, financed by a grant from Augustus, who had been persuaded to help him by Leo Rauch. With the help of the Dresden painter and administrator Christian Dietrich, Winckelmann made contact with Anton Raphael Mengs, who had gone to Rome in 1752 in his capacity as painter to the Saxon court. Mengs found Winckelmann accommodation in the Palazzo Zuccari, which was a center for many foreign artists. The friendship with Mengs was to become very important for Winckelmann during his first years in Rome. At the time Mengs was highly regarded as an artist in the developing classical style, though his reputation has not survived.

Winckelmann soon made contact with other prominent artists working in the city, including Angelica Kauffman (her preferred spelling of her name), the Swiss-born artist, who was later, in 1764, to paint one of the most famous portraits of Winckelmann. And through his acquaintanceship with the prelate Michelangelo Giacomelli he managed to get to know many scholars in Rome.

In 1756 the Seven Years War broke out, and one of the consequences was that Dresden was occupied by the Prussians. This led Winckelmann to fear that his allowance from the King of Saxony might be discontinued, so he started to seek other sources of income. Archinto had now become Cardinal Secretary of State, and Winckelmann offered him his services as librarian. Archinto not only gave him the job, but also provided him with a comfortable five-room apartment in the Palazzo Cancellaria. This facilitated Winckelmann's contacts with Roman academia, and he was able to gain access to the most substantial libraries, including that of the Collegio Romano, which contained a large collection of works relating to antiquarian studies. During this period in Rome he was also able to study the collections of art and antiquities in many Roman villas belonging to illustrious families, such as those of the Medici, the Borghese, and the Negroni, Mattei, and Ludovisi. He also undertook trips to the Villa Hadriana and to Tivoli.

For some time Winckelmann had wanted to go and view the collection of gems owned by the Baron Philippe von Stosch in Florence, who wanted Winckelmann to publish something about his collection. When the baron died in 1757, his nephew, Heinrich Wilhelm Muzell-Stosch, invited Winckelmann to come to Florence to draw up a catalogue of the collection, with the aim of selling it. Thus it came about that Winckelmann spent the period from September 1758 till April 1759 in Florence. Through this one work, *Description of the Engraved Stones of the Former Baron Stosch* (published in French, 1760), Winckelmann was to set new standards for research into the history of antique precious stones: he described them very precisely, organized them according to their style, and provided interpretations of the mythological motifs engraved on them.

Baron von Stosch had been instrumental in securing Winckelmann's future: he had recommended him to Cardinal Alessandro Albani, a well-known expert in antiquities, and when Archinto died, the cardinal offered Winckelmann the post of librarian in his own service. When he returned to Rome, Winckelmann moved into a suite of four rooms in the cardinal's palace at the Quattro Fontane. His main duty was the supervision of the library, which had been partly founded by Albani's uncle, Pope Clement XI. Winckelmann was lucky to find in the cardinal an enthusiastic supporter of all his research interests.

Thus, while in Rome he was able to undertake many research trips. He was especially interested in the archaeological excavations in the Kingdom of Naples, and between 1758 and 1767 he visited the area four times, to view the excavations of the towns destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79: Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae. He spent lengthy stays there from February to May 1758, from January to February 1762, and from February to March 1764. His last visit there took place in the autumn of 1767. After his second trip in 1762 he gathered all his thoughts and observations together in his *Open Letter on the Herculanean Discoveries*, which is included in full in the present volume. In 1758 he had already written a lengthy study on ancient scripts found at Herculaneum, entitled *Report on the Ancient Herculanean Scripts*. These two works helped to spread knowledge about the towns buried by Vesuvius, and established a methodology for the description of excavations.

He was also developing an interest in ancient Greek architecture. In his first visit to Naples in 1758 he had visited the temples at Paestum, which are among the earliest and best-preserved Greek temples in Italy. On his observations made during this visit he based his descriptions of ancient Greek temple architecture and its development, presented at length in the essay *Remarks on the Architecture of the Ancients*, completed after his second visit in 1762. In the present volume is included the first version of this study, entitled *Preliminary Report on Remarks on the Architecture of the Ancients*. During this period Winckelmann also visited Agrigento in Sicily and wrote a description of the temples there. This essay, *Remarks on the Architecture of the Old Temples of Agrigento in Sicily*, completed in 1759, is also included in the present volume. 1759 proved to be a very productive year for him, and other essays of that year are also included in this volume: *Recalling the Observation of Works of Art*, *On Grace in Works of Art*, and *Description of the Torso in the Belvedere in Rome*.

Probably Winckelmann's highest accomplishment in terms of social status occurred in the spring of 1763. On March 30, 1763, the President of All Antiquities In and Around Rome, Abbate Ridolfino Venuti, died. Cardinal Albani proposed that Winckelmann take over his responsibilities under the title of Papal Antiquarian. He was appointed on April 11,

and with the post came considerable power and influence. Any export of antiquities required his authorization, and any site where new archaeological finds were made had to be reported to him via two assessors who worked for him. He also had the responsibility of acting as guide to the antiquities of Rome for any person of importance visiting the city. As there was little income attached to the appointment, Albani managed to arrange for Winckelmann to combine his responsibilities with a post in the Vatican Library, as *Scrittore Teutonico* (Library Scribe Responsible for German Language). In the following year he was appointed in addition to a similar post for Greek language. This post resulted in him now having to keep regular working hours in the library: every day except Thursdays and Sundays, from 9:00 a.m. till midday. It was in the same year, 1763, that his essay entitled *Treatise on the Capacity for Sensitivity to the Beautiful in Art, and the Method of Teaching It* appeared, which is also included in the present volume. In 1764 he published his more extensive study of Herculaneum, entitled *Report on the Latest Herculanean Excavations*.

Homoerotic Sensibility

All the evidence indicates that Winckelmann was homosexual, though some of the earlier accounts of his life pass over this fact in silence or explain away the language of many of his letters as typical of the flowery declarations of affection between males of the period. It was an essential part of Winckelmann's sensibility, however, and must be taken into account when considering his views on the culture and art of Greek antiquity. He argued that the young, naked male body was for the Greeks the supreme embodiment of their ideals of both natural and artistic beauty. This was undoubtedly the case, and, though some might argue that his own inclinations biased his interpretations, one can more plausibly assert that, on the contrary, they helped to right the balance. Before Winckelmann the homoerotic aspects of classical Greek art had been played down too much. His homoerotic sensibility thus enabled him to perceive the beauty of the male nude more clearly and to describe it evocatively. The interrelationship between Winckelmann's homosexuality and his theories of art has been explored extensively by two authors in recent years: Alex Potts in his book *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (1994), and Wolfgang von Wangenstein in his book *Der verworfene Stein: Winckelmann's Leben* (2005). I am indebted to both these authors for their insights.

Winckelmann was clearly aware of his sexual inclinations from at least his mid-twenties, if not earlier. He recalled in a letter to Stosch in 1765 that he had felt his first real love and friendship in his relationship to his pupil, Peter Lamprecht, when he took up his post as tutor to him in Seehausen in 1743.³ Strong affection for the young men he came to know

at various times in his life is also reflected in the dedications of his works. It was not so common at the time to dedicate a work with such fulsome expressions of affection to a friend. In the dedication for his *Treatise on the Capacity for Sensitivity to the Beautiful in Art* . . . of 1763 his sense of loss at the departure of the dedicatee, a nobleman from Latvia, Friedrich Rheinhold von Berg, is expressed unequivocally. Potts describes the dedication as “almost a love poem,” and argues that “his disquisition on beauty had in large part been inspired by Berg.”⁴ That the dedication was not just a conventional expression of devotion is confirmed by a letter to another of Winckelmann’s correspondents. In August of 1763 he wrote to a young Swiss friend, Leonhard Usteri: “I fell in love, and how, with a young Latvian and promised him the best of all letters.”⁵

It is known from Winckelmann’s correspondence that he also indulged occasionally in sexual adventures of a more casual nature, but he kept a clear distinction in his mind between the idealized friendships he maintained with the young noblemen of his acquaintance and such casual affairs. He wrote openly of the latter to certain of his friends whom he knew he could trust, such as a Dr. Bianconi at the Saxon court, to whom he described his experience of submitting to anal intercourse.⁶ And it seems that Cardinal Albani was generally tolerant of Winckelmann’s sexual adventures. To another friend Winckelmann wrote of how he often regaled Albani with stories of his “amours.”⁷

There is one remarkable source for Winckelmann’s sexual indulgence with younger men of a lower class: Casanova’s autobiography. Giacomo Girolamo Casanova de Seingalt, to give him his full name, wrote his *Story of My Life* (*Histoire de ma vie*) in French between 1789 and 1792. It must of course remain doubtful to what extent Casanova’s account, particularly in its description of details and reporting of dialogue, can be relied on. Certain only are the impressions left in Casanova’s mind. He met Winckelmann in Rome in 1761 and one day went to see him in his study, obviously unannounced. As he entered he saw Winckelmann withdrawing quickly from close proximity to a young boy. In Casanova’s account, he gave Winckelmann every opportunity to pretend that nothing untoward had happened, but Winckelmann insisted on justifying himself, claiming that as he was researching the culture and manners of the ancient Greeks, he should experience the kind of love that they had praised so much. Casanova concludes by saying that Winckelmann declared his experiment to have been a failure and that women were clearly preferable in every respect.⁸ Given the openness about his sexuality in letters to certain friends and even to the cardinal, it is difficult to believe that Winckelmann was seriously worried about the libertine spreading rumors about him.

The fact that Winckelmann had one close relationship to a woman should not be passed over without comment. It was with the wife of one of his friends. His relationship to the painter Anton Raphael Mengs