

The Paper Museum of Cassiano dal Pozzo: a Catalogue Raisonné

In October 2001 the latest two of the five volumes from this series published to date were launched at a reception hosted by the Prince of Wales at Windsor Castle: *Ancient Mosaics and Wallpaintings*, by Helen Whitehouse, from *Series A: Antiquities and Architecture*, and *Fossil Woods and Other Geological Specimens*, by Andrew C. Scott and David Freedberg, from *Series B: Natural History*. **Henrietta McBurney** describes the history of the Paper Museum, and the project to catalogue it.

The idea of cataloguing the Paper Museum was conceived around fifteen years ago when two art history scholars visited the Print Room at Windsor to examine some of the over-looked natural history drawings from the dal Pozzo collection. Their points of interest differed, but they shared a concern that these drawings should be rescued from obscurity and set in their proper context – not so much because of their individual qualities as drawings (although some were indeed very fine) but because of their interest and importance as part of a unique early seventeenth-century collection. A committee was formed under the chairmanship of two Fellows of the British Academy, Francis Haskell and Jennifer Montagu, to oversee the cataloguing and publishing of an estimated total of 7,000 drawings. A series of over thirty volumes was projected, divided as far as possible according to the categories of objects depicted in the Paper Museum, and cataloguers were sought amongst specialists in the different areas. A project base was set up at Windsor in 1987, with funds for an assistant and a database provided by Olivetti. In 2001 the project was affiliated with the Warburg Institute and an office provided by them for a newly appointed Managing Editor.

The *Museo cartaceo* (or ‘museum on paper’), as Cassiano dal Pozzo (1588–1657) described his collection to a fellow scholar, was assembled out of a desire to form a visual encyclopaedia of every branch of knowledge, an archive of images that could be used to improve the study of archaeology and natural history. The subject-matter of the drawings covered the surviving remains of ancient civilisation, including wall-paintings and mosaics, inscriptions, household objects; art and other objects connected with the early Christian church; Renaissance architecture and decorative arts; and every aspect of the natural world, local and exotic, from fossils and fungi to birds and animals. These drawings were commissioned from artists who either copied directly from the objects themselves or from drawings in other collections; some were

acquired as part of earlier sketchbooks, and others as individual sheets sent to Cassiano by his correspondents from around Europe. The drawings and prints (of which there was also a large number) were classified by subject matter, mounted in albums and kept in the library which formed part of the larger museum and art collection housed within his small palazzo in Rome.

The dal Pozzo collection was visited by numerous scholars, collectors and men of letters, both during Cassiano’s lifetime and that of his younger brother, Carlo Antonio (1606–89). Amongst English visitors to the dal Pozzo residence were John Evelyn, who in 1644 was particularly impressed by the ‘choyce designs and drawings’ in the collection; and in 1662, the traveller, Philip Skippon, who, unusually amongst the accounts of visitors, gave us a description not only of the drawings after the antique, but also of those depicting natural history subjects. He noted, for example, there being ‘Among the pictures ..., a dolphin brought to the fish-market in Rome, having one fin on the middle of the back, a pair of fins under the gills, a longish snout, wide mouth, a forked tail, and is well armed with sharp teeth’, a description that would seem to fit a drawing of a common dolphin which survives in the Paper Museum. In a letter of 1622 Cassiano had expressed the hope that, ‘the drawings I am assembling could be used as illustrations to writings’. Although some groups of drawings (most notably those of the citrus fruits, and some of the ornithological subjects) were used in specialist works (published under other scholars’ names), and a few of the drawings after the antique were reproduced in antiquarian publications, the majority of the drawings have remained unpublished until the present day.

Cassiano was born near Turin into a family which had held distinguished posts in the administration of the Dukes of Savoy. However, most of his upbringing was in Pisa, where his father’s cousin, Carlo Antonio dal Pozzo, who was Archbishop of

The project was officially adopted as an Academy Research Project in 1989. In 1997 a grant was made by the Academy for the salary of a full-time assistant to the project, based in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle. This grant has been renewed each year, and will end in Spring 2003.



Foxglove *Digitalis Purpurea*
17th century Italian, watercolour.
Windsor, RL 27891

the city and minister to Ferdinand I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, took charge of his education, made him a knight of the military order of S.Stefano, and conferred various legacies on him. Cassiano qualified as a lawyer in the family



Figure 1. Mosaic at Bevagna: marine creatures. 17th century Italian, drawing.
Private Collection, Sven Gahlin, London.

tradition, being appointed a judge in Siena by the age of twenty. However, in 1611, he decided to give up his legal career in order to pursue his cultural interests and he moved to Rome where he spent the greater part of his adult life, becoming one of the foremost patrons of art and scholarship of his time. He held a number of appointments in

the household of Cardinal Francesco Barberini, nephew to Pope Urban VIII, positions that gave him the income and opportunity to pursue his own interests. In 1625 and 1626 he accompanied Cardinal Barberini on diplomatic missions to France and Spain, the only visits abroad he ever made. During these travels he kept diaries recording the collections he saw and the people he met; amongst the latter were the artist Rubens, and the antiquarian Nicolas-Claude, Fabri de Peiresc. Peiresc became an important member of the circle of intellectuals from all over Europe with whom Cassiano corresponded throughout much of his life, exchanging letters, documents, drawings, antiquities, dead and sometimes even live animals. In 1622 Cassiano was made a member of Europe's first modern scientific society, the Accademia dei Lincei; his contact with Federico Cesi, its founder, and the other members of the society, which included Galileo, had a formative influence on his own approach to the study of the natural world. After Cesi's death in 1630, Cassiano acquired a large number of the society's drawings, books and scientific instruments for his own collection.

When Cassiano died in 1657, his younger brother inherited the Paper Museum and continued to add to it until his death. In 1703, the Paper Museum, together with its accompanying library, was sold by the dal Pozzo heirs to the Albani Pope, Clement IX. The major part of it (then amounting to around 200 folio albums) was bought from his nephew, Cardinal Alessandro Albani, by George III in 1762, since which time it has been in the Royal Library. Parts of the Paper Museum have, however, been separated from the main corpus during its history: in the eighteenth century sections of the architectural and antiquarian drawings, most of which are now in the British Museum and the Sir John Soane's Museum; in the nineteenth century many of the prints, the majority of which are now in the British Library; and in the twentieth century around 750 folios of natural history subjects, together with a handful of drawings after the antique, groups which have been widely dispersed on the art market. When the decision was made to catalogue the drawings, however, it was agreed that as many of the dispersed drawings as possible, along with those remaining in the Royal Library, should be included so that the scope and extent of Cassiano's original enterprise be reflected fully. The importance of the Paper Museum undoubtedly lies in the whole rather than the parts; however, certain groups and individual drawings are of great significance for archaeologists, scientists and historians of art and architecture. Many of



the drawings of antiquities, for example, provide records of the state of preservation of a particular piece of sculpture or bas-relief before later restoration. A set of plans and elevations constitutes the only record of the scaffolding designed in 1631 for the erection of Bernini's Baldacchino in St Peter's, Rome.

Although the process of cataloguing this vast and diverse group of drawings has inevitably presented problems, many unimagined at the outset, it has also brought with it unexpected discoveries and challenges. The task of reconstructing the Paper Museum is made particularly difficult not only by the fact that over a third of the known contents is dispersed amongst different collections, some abroad, but also because significant items which we know to have been in it are as yet unlocated, and may indeed be lost altogether. The task of looking for them (they sometimes masquerade as eighteenth- or even nineteenth-century drawings) continues parallel to the task of cataloguing what is already known. All this may mean that a cataloguer has to assimilate new drawings into his or her volume at any stage during the writing of it. For example, a 'lost' drawing of an ancient Roman mosaic of sea monsters from Bevagna appeared on the art market during the last stages of producing *Ancient Mosaics and Wallpaintings*, too late for it to be incorporated in its rightful place in the catalogue with the other drawings of mosaics; it therefore appears in a section called 'Lost drawings' (together with two other drawings documented but unlocated) at the end of the

volume (Figure 1). In the case of the volume in the natural history series to be devoted to *Mammals, Fishes and other Fauna*, only nine drawings of mammals have been located, although we know from George III's inventory that there was an album containing twenty-five folios of drawings of 'Quadrupeds'. Some of the missing subjects, however, are known from Philip Skippon's account, allowing the authors of the catalogue to attempt a reconstruction of what might originally have been contained in the zoological section of the Paper Museum. One of the nine drawings located, a view of a badger with details of its paw and ear, has only recently emerged in a private collection (Figure 2).

There is a problem inherent in the cataloguing of works of art depicting scientific subject matter, resulting in the need to combine expertise from very different disciplines. In the case of the antiquarian drawings, specialists of epigraphy or of ancient Roman household objects may not be familiar with the techniques and conventions of Italian draughtsmen of the Baroque period, whereas without such specialist knowledge the art historian is hard pressed to identify and evaluate the subject-matter depicted (Figure 3). With the natural history drawings, the different disciplines may be even more alien. The preparation of *Fossil Woods and other Geological Specimens* was held up for several years by the fact that various palaeontologists, who were shown the albums containing over a hundred monochrome drawings of fossil wood specimens, felt unable, in the

Figure 2. Badger with details of paw and ear. Watercolour by Vincenzo Leonardi (fl. 1620–46). Private Collection, Britain.

absence of the actual specimens, to comment. A breakthrough was made only when a palaeobotanist was found who, taking his clue from the names of the fossil sites in Umbria inscribed on a few of the drawings, persuaded the project that a brief visit to these localities might provide at least some of the missing information. As a result of his fieldwork (during which he found several specimens uncannily similar to those depicted in the drawings [Figure 4]) and his discussions with the Italian palaeontologists working on the sites, he was able to identify the whole range of fossil preservation observed and depicted by the early seventeenth-century Italian scientists. Equally crucial to the study was the art historian involved, one of very few able to elucidate the abbreviated Latin inscriptions on the drawings.

Figure 4. Fossil wood with branch. Specimen from Dunarobba (object); Windsor, RL 25634 (17th century Italian, drawing).

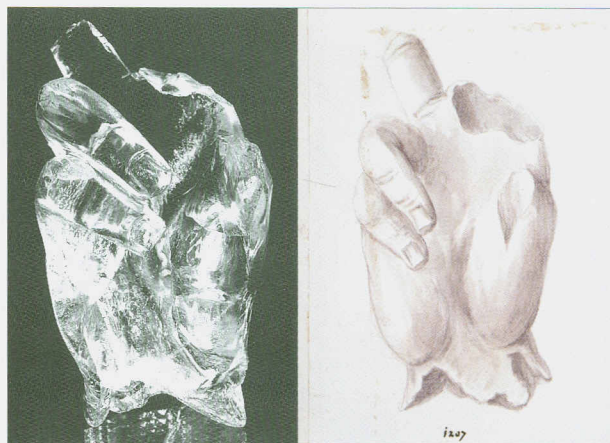


Figure 3. Roman rock-crystal Hand of Sabazius. © The British Museum, 1869.2–5.7 (object); Windsor, RL 11172 (17th century Italian, drawing).

Paper Museum' was convened jointly by the British Museum and the Warburg Institute, the proceedings of which were published by Olivetti. Two exhibitions on the Paper Museum have been held: one in the British Museum in 1992, which included a small selection of three-dimensional objects – the subjects of some of the drawings – and one in the National Gallery of Scotland in 1997, this one limited to drawings from the Royal Collection. Catalogues to accompany each of these exhibitions, published by Olivetti and the National Gallery of Scotland respectively, were produced. A further exhibition is planned for the new Queen's Gallery, London, with possible showings in Italy. This exhibition, again, will be made up entirely of items from the Royal Collection, including a significant number of drawings shown for the first time, and with a greater emphasis on the different categories of prints which must once have formed part of the Paper Museum; the accompanying catalogue will be published by the Royal Collection. While most of the cataloguing energy must of necessity go into the catalogue raisonné, the publication of exhibition catalogues aimed at a more general audience will, it is hoped, bring the main cataloguing enterprise to a wider audience, and may even have the happy consequence of bringing previously unrecognised drawings to our knowledge.

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