

## Andrea Lauria. From the Renaissance Studiolo to the Contemporary Museum

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**Andrea Lauria. *From the Renaissance Studiolo to the Contemporary Museum*. Rome: Universitalia, 2020. Pp. 219 + 145 illustrations. ISBN 9788832922505.**

Andrea Lauria's *From the Renaissance Studiolo to the Contemporary Museum* reveals how important the history of museums and collecting has become to training museum professionals and even those working in Italy's tourism industry. Lauria has written this survey of collections since the fourteenth century as part of the instructional materials for the Università di Roma Tor Vergata, which offers a Masters in "Tourism, Strategy, Cultural Heritage and Made in Italy." His book synthesizes several decades of scholarship to narrate the evolution of collections during the past six hundred years.

Lauria rightfully emphasizes the centrality of the Italian peninsula to these developments while placing Italian collections in a more global context. His work focuses especially on the European context while also discussing more recent developments in the role of museums in the contemporary Middle East. This is an explicit strategy that informs the structure of the book and the bibliography on which it is based. Lauria's questions about museums invite readers to consider what museums have done in the past and what they can do in the present.

We begin with the *studiolo*. Lauria invokes Petrarch as a noteworthy example of a scholar-collector who filled his study with precious things. The prototype of the Renaissance antiquarian, Petrarch is presented as having a large ancient coin collection, along with his good friend Boccaccio, though I think this point conflates the rise of numismatics in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with its more tentative origins in Petrarch's time. This early generation of humanists began to fill their studies with things they cared about, something that is quite evident in Petrarch's will as well as his anxious conversations with himself about his love of books and paintings. Lauria presents Petrarch as a man committed to collecting for himself more than building a collection that others might appreciate. This conclusion rings true for anyone who has read Petrarch's voluminous writings.

During the fifteenth century, the *studiolo* truly came of age in the princely culture of magnificence in France, Burgundy, and the Low Countries; in the Italian Renaissance courts of Ferrara, Urbino, and Mantua; in Medicean Florence; and in the Roman palaces of wealthy cardinals and antiquarians. While Lauria's book does not offer a complete history of these important developments, it presents them as one forerunner to the modern museum. The other, not surprisingly, is the early modern cabinet of curiosities or Wunderkammer. Lauria describes this

as a smaller, scientific, secret, and noble space for things. While I would certainly agree that the cabinet emphasized science and invention more than the *studiolo* did, the considerable research done on such collections between the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries doesn't entirely bear out this description. Many different kinds of people created cabinets in their homes, and they were rarely secretive. I'm not sure anyone would describe Ulisse Aldrovandi's museum in Bologna, Ferrante Imperato's natural history cabinet in Naples, or the Tradescant collection in Lambeth as small or aristocratic.

Lauria draws a sharp distinction between these earlier collections and "the setting up of real museums" (25) at the end of the eighteenth century. His criteria reflect the late eighteenth-century reconceptualization of earlier collections as outdated, unsystematic, and private rather than public. Yet before we simply accept how this moment in museum building viewed the past, we need to ask ourselves why the Statuario Pubblico in Venice (opened in 1596) and the Studio Aldrovandi in Bologna (installed in the city's Palazzo Pubblico in 1616) aren't mentioned as early examples of public museums. As early museums, they are more important than Sixtus IV's 1471 donation of important Roman statuary to the Capitoline, which was not actually a "museum" though it became a politically significant public display of antiquities gifted by the pope to the Roman people that would eventually become part of the Capitoline Museum, which opened in 1734. How, too, should we see Paolo Giovio's influential museum that he developed in Rome and then transported to his villa on the shores of Lake Como, writing a will that obliged his heirs to show it to the public? A number of influential collectors anticipated a public future of their museums and cabinets with family, though these rarely turned out well. In the case of Manfredo Settala, he assured the future of his seventeenth-century gallery in Milan by giving it to the Biblioteca and Pinacoteca Ambrosiana when the primary lineage of his family ceased to exist. A more nuanced history of the emergence of the idea of a public museum (including how Renaissance collectors read Pliny the Elder's comments about ancient Roman libraries and collections in his *Natural History*) would have made this section far more interesting.

Rightfully, Lauria wants readers of his survey to understand the rise of the Uffizi, a late sixteenth-century princely gallery filled with curiosities and transformed into a Grand Tourists' artistic paradise by the mid-eighteenth century, and the emergence of other signature institutions such as the Vatican Museums, the British Museum, and the Louvre. Each has a great and different history discussed

in this book, though I think it would have been interesting to bring out their differences further and also to discuss some of the Central European examples. Last but hardly least is how Lauria brings his history of museums into the present, citing the growth of the “hyper-museum” in locations such as Bilbao and Abu Dhabi. He ends his survey with a reflection on museums and modernity, comparing Western Europe and the Middle East. There is no question that the Louvre Abu Dhabi should be part of contemporary history, along with other museums in different parts of the world such as Asia and the Americas. This final chapter could be greatly complicated by taking a more global approach rather than primarily comparing Europe and the Middle East or measuring the museum culture in the contemporary Middle East against the history of the European museum. Nonetheless, Lauria’s survey surely will encourage readers to return to his opening question—“What is a museum for in the 21st century?” (7).

Readers unfamiliar with this subject will get an introduction from this book that takes the long rather than the short approach. Lauria’s book is copiously illustrated, which is most helpful, save for the peculiar decision to include modernized coats of arms for various noble lineages of collectors. The bibliography will also be a good basis for further reading, though I wish Lauria had made more effort to update key parts of his bibliography to include the most recent books on key subjects. Specialists will surely have their quibbles with each chapter. But I think we would all agree on the importance of having this kind of survey as part of the training of people working in tourism in a country such as Italy, so rich in the diversity and significance of its museums.

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