

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Christian, Kathleen, project dir. Census of Antique Works of Art and Architecture Known in the Renaissance. Database

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**Christian, Kathleen, project dir.**

**Census of Antique Works of Art and Architecture Known in the Renaissance. Database.**

Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2007. Accessed 20 April 2023. [database.census.de](http://database.census.de).

Which antiquities were known in the Renaissance, where, by whom, and in what condition? These are the basic and enduring questions answered by the Census of Antique Works of Art and Architecture Known in the Renaissance. In its current version, Census provides a comprehensive, digital documentation of antique works of art and architecture known to the artists, patrons, and documentarians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Originally conceived in 1946 at Vassar College, Census's first, physical index system was compiled by Phyllis Pray Bober in 1947 with the help of co-founders Fritz Saxl, Richard Kratheimer, and Karl Leo Heinrich Lehmann. Over the years, expert contributors, with Ruth Rubinstein most notable among them, have continually elaborated upon the data up to the present day. The card system was digitized in the 1980s as part of the J. Paul Getty Trust's Art History Information Program, and since 1995, Census has been based at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, with its direction tied to the Professorship of Early Modern Art at the Institut für Kunst- und Bildgeschichte. The site's first open-access version went online in 2007, and the current director, Kathleen Christian, has maintained the database since 2020.<sup>1</sup> In April 2023, the Census's latest version went live with an all-new interface.

The resource is notable for its comprehensiveness, with over 11,000 entries on various forms of known monuments from the ancient world including sculptures, masks, well-heads, coins, and elements of architecture such as column bases. These artifacts are corroborated by more than 200,000 distinct documentary entries related to both their representative (e.g., sketchbook entries and prints) and written (e.g., inventories, travelogues, and archival documents) sources. Census files are split into two major categories: "Antique Monuments" and "Postclassical Works" are considered "primary files," and

1. In addition to Kathleen Christian in her position as project director, Census is supported by the following staff members: Franz Engel, research associate and coordinator; Katharina Bedenbender, research associate; Pernille Dybvig, Luise Mörke, and Clara Sawatzki, student assistants; and Elisabeth Herzog, intern.

additional information on either set can be found in supplementary categories called “authority files.” This information is sortable and searchable by the interconnected subcategories and attributes of “location,” “associated buildings,” “persons,” “date,” “style,” and so on, with the ability to search all subcategory types individually or simultaneously.

Census’s old, bright blue and grey colour scheme, reminiscent of the now long-forgotten Windows 2000 operating system, is now gone, giving way to a new user interface (UI) that highlights the stunning image collection. Clear search tools and precise results make it easy to find information on either the monuments or documents one is looking for. A simple monument search for “Ariadne,” for example, returns inclusive results with “Father Monuments” and any dependent “Children,” with all or part of that name/alias presented in a gallery view. Specific results (e.g., “Sleeping Ariadne”) are immediately populated alongside related postclassical works and, when selected, present the user with informative tabs such as “History,” including data on the execution date of the monument, its style, and the artist(s) where known; “Provenance,” detailing Renaissance provenance events; “Relationships,” providing early modern documents that record the monument; and even “Bibliography,” supplying related secondary literature for review and for following up Census leads. The advanced search function allows users to investigate keywords beyond just name or alias while adjusting search criteria in specific ways (e.g., searching Renaissance Attributions, Dimensions, and Replica status). Similar specificity is available for querying Locations, Persons of Interest, Dates, Styles, Inscriptions, and Bibliography. For ease of use, the Census staff has also created a User Manual ([census.de/en/database/user-manual](http://census.de/en/database/user-manual)), which offers information on the organization of the database and instructions on how to get the most out of your search.

For an example of the resource’s user experience (UX), let us search for the *Farnese Atlas*. This ancient Roman marble statue of the Titan, Atlas, is currently located in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples. To locate the artwork within Census, simply search for its name using the search bar. Once Census has identified it, the artwork’s “Detail View” will display a detailed description of its historical context, creation date, and current location, alongside an image of the statue and all related postclassical works. The *Farnese Atlas*’s “Relationships” tab presents 20 documents that account for its presence in the

Renaissance. These documents can be viewed as a text list or as thumbnail images. For example, users can see a drawing of the statue in its pre-renovated state between 1550 and 1555 in the Codex Coburgensis, brought up right next to a photo of its current state of preservation. These detail views do not yet have the map-based “GeoCensus” feature of Census’s last version, but it should be up and running soon ([census.de/blog/new-interface](https://census.de/blog/new-interface)). This feature provided researchers with data on the mobility of antique monuments during and after the early modern period. This is perhaps most useful for tracking down monuments dating back to the Renaissance that are no longer within familial collections and have now entered museums across the globe. In the case of the *Farnese Atlas*, two pins around Rome indicated its early modern identification in the house of Bernardino Fabio, c. 1550, and in the Palazzo Farnese after 1562; a third pin in Naples showed its current exhibition spot.

One aspect that stands out in the resource is its integration of high-quality images. In the “Large Image Viewer,” photographs of desired monuments can be enlarged and zoomed in on, making it easy to study the details of ancient artworks and their early modern representative sources. Easily engaged through Census’s photo viewer are the stylistic details of a sculpture, the lettering of either antique or post-antique inscriptions on a monument, as well as explicit written designations of whereabouts from sketchbooks and other crucial details. Art historians rejoice here, too, as images of monuments and/or documents can be directly compared, side by side, with the “Image Comparer” tool! With this feature, researchers can make multiple comparisons on the screen. For example, researchers can view a photograph of an ancient monument alongside a depiction of it in a Renaissance print, or compare two Renaissance drawings of the same monument by different artists. This tool will be of interest to architectural historians, perhaps, who can zoom in on a specific detail of architectural decoration while comparing it to its larger context within a building, for instance.

Under Christian’s leadership, the past three years have spelled several updates to the database’s photographic resources. A photographic campaign begun in 2021 provided new access to beautiful, high-resolution images sourced from archives around the world including those at the Musei Capitolini in Rome, the Biblioteca Comunale in Siena, and the Ashmolean in Oxford, to name a few. Christian’s student assistants at the Institut für Kunst- und Bildgeschichte

have also been working hard to upload new and updated reproductions of images from the Census's past. Now, new colour images have replaced those black-and-white images that dated back to the early days of the resource, with the latest digital images able to be magnified so clearly as to represent even individual fibres in the paper that has survived to us from early modern sketchbooks, artist studies, or even late antique manuscript illuminations.<sup>1</sup> On each monument page, there is a section that allows users to save artworks to a custom list, view related artworks, and access external links for further research. This feature is particularly useful for scholars who are working on cataloguing a particular Renaissance antiquities collection, for example, or for students who are preparing for exams. To save this data, you need a free personal account, accessible via email application. In terms of privacy and data protection, the Census website uses Matomo ([matomo.org](https://matomo.org)), a free and ethical privacy-focused web analytics open-source software that does not use analytics-tracking cookies. A full data protection statement is linked on the database home page ([hu-berlin.de/en/hu-en/imprint/data-protection-statement](https://hu-berlin.de/en/hu-en/imprint/data-protection-statement)).

Overall, the resource's UX is highly satisfactory. Census is supported by Fylr ([fylr.io](https://fylr.io)), a web-based multimedia database management system built on top of open-source technologies (e.g., Linux, Apache, PostgreSQL) integrating EasyDB, Census's previous web host, allowing for data modelling, search and suggest, as well as tag management and other features helpful on both the database- and user-end. Census is intuitive and easy to use, with the Fylr front-end web-app supported by all major Internet browsers, making it an excellent resource for teaching, research, and study anywhere. While Census is by no means complete, the database is well maintained and updated daily, with its contributors cited for reference in other scholarly work, where appropriate.

The Census of Antique Works of Art and Architecture Known in the Renaissance is an essential resource for historians of Renaissance art and those interested in the long life of ancient art and architecture. Its usefulness as a carefully composed online research tool is undeniable, and its commitment to open access and the dissemination of its unique knowledge base is commendable. Census's comprehensiveness, user-friendly interface, and integration of high-quality images make it an invaluable tool for researchers and students alike. The resource's documentation is thorough, informative, accurate, and reliable.

1. See Sawatzki, "Geflügelte Pferde."

This spring's UI update by Christian and her support staff promises to make continued work with this extraordinary relational database even easier and more intuitive to use than ever before.

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