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WHEN IS A COLLECTION A COLLECTION?

Provenance Studies and the Role of Dealers' Collections

Abstract

The paper discusses a phenomenon in the history of collecting antiquities that is rarely recognised. Many antiquities acquired and presented in museums as 'collections' were, in fact, assembled by dealers. Thus the compilation of objects was guided by a commercial incentive, sometimes to meet specific gaps in museum collections or, at other times, to empty the dealers' stocks. The practice had its historical roots in the role of dealers as agents, but became more widespread during the nineteenth century and was particularly effective in the twentieth, as collection histories acquired additional economic, social and ethical value. This paper critically analyses the inclusion of such 'collections' in museum collection histories, using provenance studies as a key methodology and focusing on developments in the nineteenth century.

Keywords: collectors, dealer's collections, provenance studies, Krzysztof Pomian

Antiquities collecting has been studied as a phenomenon for many years, but what defines a collection is rarely discussed today. Johann Zoffany's painting of Charles Townley, painted in 1781–1783 and showing the collector surrounded by his sculptures and his friends, is the quintessence of how we imagine the collector and his collection: the collection embraces Townley, endowing him with the values and qualities of knowledge and taste (Fig. 1). The image is constructed: the library is crowded with sculptures, the atmosphere is of scholarship, Townley himself is seated at a desk with one book open and another lying on the floor. His two friends stand behind him: the politician Charles Greville and the British Museum conservator Thomas Astle. In a chair in the lower front

corner of the painting, we see the French antiquarian d'Hancarville, author of the catalogue of Townley's collection. The painting embraces the image of the collection closely connected to the personality of the collector. We feel comfortable with this image, and it is often this kind of image that comes to mind when we encounter the term 'collection': objects selected with a personal sense of aesthetics and taste to the forefront, a sense shaped by the 'persona' of the collector – as she/he shapes herself/himself in the image as a scholarly collector. As defined in ICOM's *Key concepts of museology*:

a collection may be defined as a set of material or intangible objects (works, artefacts, mentifacts, specimens, archive documents, testimonies, etc.) which an individual or an establishment has assembled, classified, selected, and preserved in a safe setting, and usually displays to a smaller or larger audience, according to whether the collection is public or private (Desvallées & Mairesse 2009: 26).

The strength of this trope is evident in illustrations of collectors through time, as seen, for instance, in the portrait of the school rector of St. Maria Magdalena Christian Stieff (1675-1751), shown surrounded by his books and objects distinguishing him as a scholarly collector (Hakelberg 2021, 64, Fig. 2). Another much later example is the staged image of the American collector Robert H. Lamborn and his curator in Memorial Hall against the background of his collection, in a photograph taken just over a hundred years later (Linn 2018) (Fig. 2).

In this paper, I suggest that this is an image exploited by the art market and used consciously to endow assemblages of objects gathered by dealers with added value. The term 'from the collection of...' is a common provenance reference in auction and sales catalogues; however, the term says nothing about how a collection was shaped or about whether there ever was a 'collector' with a personal taste. Next, I will present two cases of dealer 'collections' that were assembled with the sole intent of selling them. I will argue that dealer collections should not be considered collections as such, and that we need to be very careful when the word collection is used both in sales catalogues and in collection histories, as it can sometimes cover a dealer's activities and conceal a rather more commercial background.

The idea or inspiration for this paper stems from my work on the photo archive of John Marshall, the British friend and companion of Edward Perry Warren.¹ In the 1890s, Marshall and Warren acted together as agents for the

¹ On Edward Perry Warren and John Marshall, see Nørskov 2002: 69–71. On Marshall and the Metropolitan, see Petruciolli (ed.) forthcoming. The John Marshall Photographic

Boston Museum of Fine Arts; from 1906/7, when the former curator of the Boston Museum, Edward Robinson, moved to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Marshall became sole agent for the Metropolitan Museum. Marshall settled in Rome (remaining there until his death in 1928) and worked closely with Robinson and the newly appointed Gisela Richter - who was employed in 1905 as an assistant at the museum and became curator only in 1924 - the first female curator in the United States. Richard De Puma, in his account of the history of the Metropolitan's Etruscan collection, defines Marshall and Richter's relationship as a mentorship - he as her mentor, she learning from him (De Puma 2018: 34-36) – but we may note that whereas Richter published hundreds of articles of great scientific value, Marshall published only one, an account of the beautiful marble head from Chios (Marshall 1909). As agent, Marshall acquired a vast number of antiquities for the Metropolitan Museum. His photographs were subsequently donated to the British School in Rome, and that photographic archive was the object of a research project from 2015 to 2018 under which I studied Marshall's dealings in vases. That work is currently being prepared for publication, and a digital database with the photo archive will also be made accessible online at the time of publication. Making dealers' archives accessible in this way is profoundly changing the possibilities for tracking collecting histories; it is an essential tool in the rising field of provenance studies.

For the Boston Museum, Warren and Marshall had been very actively acquiring Greek vases, but that was not Marshall's focus for the Metropolitan: there, he was supposed to fill in the gaps in the collection, with a focus on sculpture. Before his arrival at the Metropolitan, the museum had acquired the Canessa collection of Greek pottery, consisting of three hundred vases. It was the acquisition of the Canessa collection that led me to reconsider what constitutes a collection in the context of the art trade.

THE CANESSA COLLECTION

The Canessa collection comprises a selection of various different kinds of vases, thus laying the groundwork for further collecting of Greek pottery. Until that moment, pottery had predominantly been represented by Cypriot

Archive will be made available on the homepage of the British School of Rome: https://british schoolatrome.wordpress.com/tag/jmarp/.

pottery from the extensive collection of Luigi Palma de Cesnola, acquired in 1874 (Anon 2004). Gisela Richter presented the acquisition of the Canessa collection both in the *Burlington Magazine* and in the museum Bulletin shortly after the acquisition (Richter 1906a; 1906b; idem 1936: 1; Nørskov [in press]). She explained how this new collection was correcting the deficiency. Interestingly, in her *Burlington Magazine* article, she puts quotation marks around 'Canessa Collection' and continues:

This collection has not existed in its present form very long. It was brought together by the dealers, Messrs. A. and C. Canessa, of Paris and Naples, and was purchased by the Museum in January of this year. If the object was to have the collection both representative and of uniform good quality, it can readily be conceded that this object has been attained. (Richter 1906a: 204)

It is clear from this passage that Richter is hesitant to define the acquisition as a collection in traditional terms. She explains the short-lived history of the 'collection', but it is not clear whether it has been assembled with the specific purpose selling it to the Metropolitan Museum. In the Bulletin, this is conveyed implicitly: it 'is especially adapted to the needs of the museum' (Richter 1906b: 77). This wording points to the fact that the collection was assembled with an eye to representativity and thus to a buyer who would appreciate this. The collection consisted of a representative selection of Greek pottery, with special emphasis on Athenian black and red-figure vases (Table 1). Even if Richter makes the point that none are of excellent quality, she defines the Athenian vases as

by far the most valuable part of the collection. They show us clearly, in unbroken succession, the rapid development and decline through which the art of vase-painting passed in Athens. We advance from vases with black figures on red ground, to the early red-figured style, with its bold but somewhat deficient drawing, and again to the finest period of Attic pottery, when the hand of the artist was skilled and trained to the utmost, until, finally, we come to the period when signs of decadence, careless drawing, and rich accessories make their appearance. (Richter 1906a: 204)

She also emphasises that some vases were made for special rites in Greece, such as white-ground lekythoi, loutrophoroi, lebes gamikoi, and onoi.

WHO WERE THE CANESSA BROTHERS?

The three Canessa brothers – Cesare (1863–1922), Ercole (1867–1929), and Amadeo (1874–1934) – became some of the most influential antiquities dealers of the early twentieth century (Jandolo 1935: 235; D'Orazi 2018). They came from Naples, and dealt primarily in coins until their involvement in the sale of the treasure of Boscoreale (Cirillo & Casale 2004; Iasiello 2017: 357; D'Orazi 2018: 9–15), the hoard of silver and gold Roman objects discovered near Pompeii in 1895 by the landowner Vincenzo De Prisco in the newly unearthed Villa Pisanella. De Prisco contacted Ercole Canessa to find a buyer for the treasure, and the Canessa brothers and their companions arrived in Paris with 41 of the objects in May 1895, offering them to the Louvre (Villefosse 1899: 32). However, the asking price of 500,000 francs was too high, and the museum's offer of half that sum was rejected (Villefosse 1898: 33; Iasiello 2017: 358).

Guido Petruccioli argues that the Canessa brothers showed exceptional creativity when transporting the Boscoreale treasure to Paris: the nephew, Francesco, revealed in a 1988 newspaper article that they had arranged an amateur bicycle tour from Italy over the border to France. The treasure was carried over the border by the participants, each carrying a piece of silver beneath their costumes (Canessa 1988; Cirillo, Casale 2004: 48; Petruccioli 2016; Smalcerz 2020: 166–167).

According to Guglielmo, Cesare's son, the brothers agreed with De Prisco to share the costs and the income from the sale fifty-fifty. The asking price was the equivalent of four billion lire; leading a life of luxury in Naples in this period would have cost 1,000 lire a month. Guglielmo Canessa states that for the brothers, the Boscoreale sale was a springboard into the international establishment and the international trade in antiquities (Iasiello 2017: 358, note 31). The brothers established their base in Paris in 1889 in the Rue La Fayette, moving to the more prestigious Avenue des Champs-Élysées in 1909 (D'Orazi 2018: 26), and the company C. & E. Canessa was formally established in 1905, with branches in Naples, Paris and New York. According to Francesco Canessa's narrative, Cesare was in charge of the gallery in Naples, Ercole managed the gallery in Paris, and Amadeo in New York (Canessa 1988; Cirillo, Casale 2004: 47). In New York, the brothers set up in Fifth Avenue, where Ercole established a close friendship with John Pierpoint Morgan and subsequently guided Morgan in his private collecting. Morgan was, of course, one of the Metropolitan Museum's greatest benefactors - a trustee from 1888 and, from 1904, president. Ercole Canessa

guided Morgan in his private collecting. The three brothers thus played a very significant role in the antiquities trade from Italy to Paris to New York in the early decades of the twentieth century.²

The brothers also had a close working relationship with Arthur Sambon (1867–1947), a numismatist and dealer, and a president of the Chambre des Experts in Paris (D'Orazi 2018: 19–23). Like the Canessas, Sambon was from Naples (he was born in Portici, to the south), where his father, Jules, was also a numismatist and antiquary; they had probably known each other since childhood. Sambon himself had been writing coin sales catalogues since 1879 (he seems to have produced the first one at the age of twelve). The first catalogue produced in collaboration with Cesare and Ercole, in 1900, was on the Naples coin collection of Professor Luigi dell'Erba. In 1901, they acted collaboratively as experts in the sales catalogue of the collection of Alfred Bourgignon, a collector living in Naples (Sambon 1901). Bourgignon had compiled an extensive collection of antiquities that attracted great attention from dealers like Paul Hartwig and Friedrich Hauser, who were especially interested in the painters of Greek vases and published some of the first papers on this subject (Rouet 2001: 30–33; Tsingarida 2014).

We can track a marked difference in approach or working method between the three Canessa galleries by looking at the catalogues they published (Fig. 4).⁶ The eighteen catalogues from Paris begin in 1900 and continue until 1913, most of them written in collaboration with Arthur Sambon. About half of these present coin collections, the other half antiquities. The twelve Neapolitan catalogues, issued between 1907 and 1923, present a diverse scope of objects in the earlier catalogues, including furniture, the later ones mostly coins. The New York gallery issued its first catalogue in 1915 in connection with the Panama Pacific International Exposition held in San Francisco, where Italy allocated space to the Canessa brothers in the national pavilion and where they showed both European art and antiquities. Three further catalogues published in New

When Cesare died in 1924, his two sons took over the Naples gallery (A. & D. Canessa), whereas Ercole kept Paris and New York.

³ The Bibliotheque Nationale lists 109 catalogues by his hand, the earliest dated 1879, when he was 12, but regularly from 1888.

⁴ On dell'Erba, see Prota 1937. He was a very close friend of Arthur Sambon.

⁵ On Bourgignon see also Voukelatos 2018.

⁶ D'Orazi provides a list of the catalogues (D'Orazi 2018: 59–64) based on research on online archives, pointing out that there might be some missing.

York presented the material as a 'collection formed by C. & E. Canessa' in 1917, 'the Canessa collection' in 1919, and the 'art collection of the expert antiquarians C. & E. Canessa of New York' in 1924. In the Canessas' European catalogues, the word 'collection' is used when presenting private collections, but not when the auction is compiled of objects from different sources; in the American catalogues, by contrast, the wording 'Canessa collection' is used in all the catalogues that present objects as collected by the dealers: that is, as objects bought by the dealers to be sold in the gallery. A different culture on the American art market seems to have made it more profitable to present the objects as part of a collection.

There is one European catalogue that presents the content as a Canessa collection. In 1904, Arthur Sambon published a small volume entitled *Vases antiques de terre cuite: Collection Canessa*. This has no introduction, but opens directly with the presentation of the objects, comprising some three hundred objects. It is in fact a catalogue of the vase collection acquired by the Metropolitan Museum in 1906. Why does Gisela Richter not mention in her account that the collection had been published two years earlier? Sambon's publication is a sales catalogue, intended for potential buyers of the entire 'collection' – even if it is not actually an auction catalogue. Having a publication on a collection or group of vases seems to have made it more valuable, and the practice seems to have been relatively widespread. Richter does refer to the catalogue in her volume on Attic red-figure vases, published in 1936. The publication is also mentioned in the bibliography of some of the vases from the Canessa publication in the digital database on the museum webpage, but not all.

It is in fact a general problem in provenance studies that objects' appearances in auction and sales catalogues have been neglected. This neglect has disguised a large number of collecting histories.⁷ It is thus one of the future tasks of provenance studies to work on the inclusion of all available information in academic books, museum catalogues and sales catalogues.

The Canessa collection was assembled and defined as a collection with the specific purpose of presenting a representative collection. As for its sources, the catalogue of 1904 provides a geographical provenance for 78 of the objects, covering many different locations – surprisingly, many of them in Greece (Table 2). Most of the material seems to derive from clandestine excavations. Only seven objects are acquired from previous collections (Table 3). Most vases are

⁷ See for instance Tsirogiannis 2019: 68–73.

complete, but there are two fragments of a red-figure vase said to have been published by Hartwig (Sambon 1904: 39, lot 116). These fragments stem from a volute krater that subsequently became the name vase of the Painter of the New York Centauromachy. Canessa had acquired the fragments at the auction of the Alfred Bourgignon collection in 1903, as mentioned by Richter in her 1936 catalogue, but not in Sambon's catalogue. The inclusion of the fragments is exceptional, and leads us to our next case.

TRADE IN FRAGMENTS

Pottery fragments constitute an area where the role of dealers has proved crucial. Fragments have been a rather unique collecting area, closely associated both with scholars and with study collections. Well-known collections belonged to scholars such as Dietrich von Bothmer and Robert Guy and also to dealers such as Herbert Cahn, one of the leading Swiss dealers of the twentieth century. Contemporary with the Canessa brothers, Edward Perry Warren too was very interested in fragments, collecting them for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Two other protagonists played a crucial role in this trade: Paul Hartwig, mentioned above, and his close friend and companion in Leipzig, Friedrich Hauser (Tsingarida 2014).

The collecting of pottery fragments developed in the second half of the nine-teenth century in close connection with connoisseurship studies. Norbert Eschbach and Daniel Gräpler have demonstrated that collections of fragments at the University of Göttingen did not consist solely of debris from chance finds, but were products of the deliberate dismemberment of vases by dealer scholars (Eschbach 2007: 86). On two occasions, in 1892 and 1897, Professor Karl Dilthey acquired two groups of fragments for the university collection – on both occasions from Hartwig. The correspondence between Hartwig and Dilthey reveals that Hartwig collected fragments for the professor for academic purposes, to provide him with a representative collection of styles and shapes for use in

8 The fragments have the inventory number 06.1021.140a–c: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/247305. I have not been able to locate the publication by Hartwig. However, in the Furtwängler Reichhold volume III, published in 1932, Hartwig refers to the fragment, explaining how he drew it himself when it was still in the possession of Bourgignon, p. 52, note 15.

teaching. This need was prompted by a change in the focus of research from iconography and antiquarian issues to types, schools and painters, a shift that paved the way for a new role and value for fragments in the collections, because fragments enable the viewer to focus on the details of painting. When only a tiny part of an image is preserved, it is easier to define the details. This, in the methodology of connoisseurship, makes it possible to distinguish the hands of different painters. Hartwig was one of the key scholars in the new field of stylistic studies in Greek painted pottery, as manifested in his significant publication Griechische Meisterschalen der Blüthezeit des strengen rot-figurigen Stiles, published in 1893. Together with Friedrich Hauser, he offered so-called Stilproben or style samples to the university collections in Germany (Eschbach 2007: 86-87).9 A detailed study of these collections has shown how fragments across the collections connect vases from Hartwig and Hauser, pointing to the practice of separating fragments belonging to the same vase and selling them off to different collections. Even vases that were already restored were deconstructed: fragments from a neck amphora were found to fit fragments from the University Museum in Pennsylvania, and traces of glue are evidence of restoration before the sale and subsequent deliberate destruction in order to sell fragments of the same vase to different collections (Eschbach 2007: 84-86). The same study also showed that the fragment collections did not become as popular as expected: large quantities of fragments from the stock of Hartwig and Hauser were acquired by Paul Arndt in Munich. Similar practices seem to have taken place in the case of late antique textiles, as shown in the paper by Anna Głowa and Joanna Sławińska (cf. pp. 287–308).

REREADING POMIAN

Krzysztof Pomian's seminal paper "The Collection: Between the Visible and the Invisible", first published in 1978 and republished in his collection *Collectors and Curiosities* in French in 1984 and in English in 1987, is still one of the best theoretical texts when it comes to the interaction between collecting and economics. The role of dealers and the market in shaping collections is a factor

⁹ Eschbach identifies collections of fragments bought from Hartwig in eleven university collections between 1892 and 1922.

often ignored in collection studies, but Pomian's point is that "when the history of their circulation is examined, the history of the economics cannot be avoided" (Pomian 1987: 5). Thus in considering when a collection can actually be defined as a collection, it is worth looking at how Pomian defines the collection as phenomenon (1987: 5):

- An institution coextensive with man both in terms of space and time meaning that there is a dialectic relationship between the collector and the collection.
- A product of a unique type of behaviour, consisting in the formation of collections, in an attempt to create a link between the visible and the invisible.
 Thereby collections are understood as meaning-making processes.

Pomian refers to two dimensions: first, the geographical dimension, as "collections are concentrated in religious and political centres" and at what he calls "intellectual, artistic and economic crossroads" (Pomian 1987: 5); and second, the social dimension, as the collection is "generally accessible only to a public satisfying certain criteria, while their actual nature and content depend on the status of the collector himself; that is, on the positions he has reached in the hierarchies of power, prestige, education and wealth" (Pomian 1987: 5).

The geographical and social dimensions thus place collecting firmly in the social and economic setting of human activities. In his text on the visible and the invisible, Pomian becomes more concrete, defining the collection in terms of the following criteria (Pomian 1987: 9):

A set of natural or artificial objects kept temporarily or permanently out of the economic circuit, afforded special protection in enclosed spaces adapted specifically for that purpose and put on display.

This definition clarifies the problem of defining 'dealer collections' as collections: their 'collections' are definitely *not* out of the economic circuit. Revisiting Pomian's definitions cited above, it is also reasonable to see economic gain as the key factor rather than meaning-making processes or purposes of power or prestige. Pomian discusses the paradox of objects in the collection being taken out of the economic circuit while being treated and taken care of as precious or valuable objects. When an object enters into a collection, it loses its function, and it is the subject (i.e. the collector) that defines the meaning and value. This process does not happen independently of time and space, but is constructed within the geographical and social dimensions that Pomian cites. This transformation is what is called *musealisation* in museological theory. But objects

'collected' by dealers do not undergo this musealisation process; their economic value is preserved as a defining dimension. I suggest that we consider the trade in objects as neither object nor collection, but as an in-between: a liminal space in which the objects are part of a constant negotiation.

This process can be discussed through the following matrix, using two dimensions (Fig. 5). The first dimension is the relationship between single objects and objects as collections. This is relevant when we are talking about the art market: objects are sold individually and have agency as individual objects, and it is through their specific character that they enter a collection and become part of an ensemble or assemblage – the collection. The horizontal line thus defines the musealisation process: the transformation from an object with a special – useful – function to a part of a collection in which it contributes to the deepening of meaning on the subject.

The second dimension is the relationship between archaeology and art. Classical antiquities are considered both as archaeological objects and art objects: they can be both simultaneously. However, the treatment, focus and approach differ depending on how they are categorised. Archaeological objects are defined as part of an archaeological context, and evaluated as part of a larger group of evidence. Art objects are defined as single objects, valued for their embedded aesthetics independent of the context they are placed in. These are two completely different ways of looking at the object, but with a common tension – especially when dealing with classical antiquities that are both archaeological objects and aesthetic works of art. The vertical line thus represents two different approaches to collecting: one focused on the object's archaeological dimension, its cultural and historical importance, and its capacity to provide new knowledge through connections to other objects; the other on the aesthetic value of the object in itself.

Once the concept of collection is appropriated by the trade in antiquities, the trade is influenced by and itself influences all these elements. Defining a group of objects as a collection adds value to the objects, as it provides them with a meaning-making process. During the late nineteenth century, research in vase painters transformed objects from archaeological objects to art objects, likewise contributing to a higher valuation: when it comes to power and value, an art collection is the most prestigious.

I hesitate to use the term 'dealer's collection' for these collections. As used by the trade, this term lends them authority (power) through the subjectivity of the collector which, actually, is not there. These collections are not the

result of the processes defined by Pomian; they are not a materialisation of the relationship between collector and object, but the result of a unique type of behaviour – behaviour that facilitates further exchanges of the objects through trade and finds the right buyer for a specific object – *not* forming a collection and creating a link between the visible and invisible.

It could be argued that dealers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were often also scholars and collectors. This is, for instance, the case with Hartwig and Hauser, mentioned above. But in fact this point emphasises the problem with dealers' collections: when does the transformation to collection take place? The question is whether dealers' collections can be placed in a special category, in the liminal space – defining dealers not as scholars, not as collectors, but as mediators using all necessary tools.

CONCLUSION

The question of when a dealer's collection really is a collection is a complex one. The development of the antiquities market during the nineteenth century gave rise to a large variety of ways to engage with antiquities. Whether these dealer collections should be called collections or not, they testify to a special process of collecting that mirrors geographical, spatial and intellectual developments in the engagement with antiquity. Dealers have played an essential role in the shaping of collections; but their 'own collections' should be carefully evaluated before this self-definition is accepted, as the definition lends incentive to processes that are secondary in these cases. When dealers use the word 'collection' themselves, they lend power and authority to the objects, adding economic value through false implications. The dealers react to specific needs on the part of the institutions – but they are also part of the process of developing and shaping those needs. In the worst case, objects are even destroyed in order to meet those needs.

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Table 1: Types of vases in Sambon's catalogue. Vases antiques de terre cuite. Collection Canessa.

3	Mycenean
3	Geometric
18	Corinthian
17	Early black figure
56	Athenian black figure
76	Atheninan red figure
16	Athenian white ground
4	Athenian black glazed
4	East Greek
9	Boiotian / Eubean
3	Campanian black glazed
26	South Italian red figure
4	Canosan
1	Daunian

Tabel 2: Geographical provenances in Sambon's catalogue. *Vases antiques de terre cuite. Collection Canessa.*

15	Greece
14	Capua
7	Attica
5	Cumae
4	Athens
4	Rhodes
4	Orvieto
3	Sicily
3	Pouille
2	Italy
2	Cerveteri
2	Eretria
1	Boiotia
1	Corneto

When is a Collection a Collection?...

15	Greece
1	Corinth
1	Vico Equence
1	Chalis
1	Suessula
1	Boscoreale
1	lalysos
1	Apulia
1	Asia Minor

Tabel 3: Collection provenances in Sambon's catalogue. *Vases antiques de terre cuite. Collection Canessa.*

2	Bourgignon
2	Castellani
1	Raoul-Rochette
1	Lécuyer
1	Prince de Drago



Fig. 1

When is a Collection a Collection?...



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

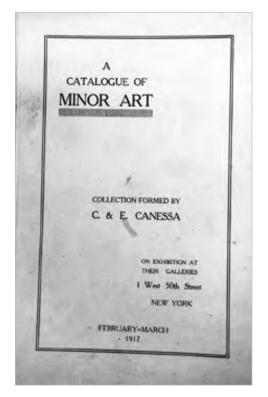


Fig. 4



Fig. 5