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Why Study the Past? Antiquarianism and Neo-stoicism in the Circle of Fabri de Peiresc, 1580–1637¹

Umberto Eco's description, in *The Island of the Day Before*, of the nameless "local gentleman" of Aix-en-Provence who was "versed in every science, possessor of a library rich not only in books but in art objects, antiquities, and embalmed animals" describes, and aptly captures the fate, of the man it refers to, Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637).² Peiresc was educated by the Jesuits in Aix and Avignon and was destined, from an early age, for a legal career and the family position in the *parlement* of Provence. A trip to Italy from 1599 to 1602 was designed by his uncle and father to further his legal education, though the young Peiresc used it to introduce himself to the world of antiquaries and scholars. His formal education was completed at Montpellier and Aix, culminating in a doctorate in both civil and canon law in January 1604. Peiresc then traveled extensively through the northern tier of the learned world, visiting English, Dutch, and Flemish scholars in 1606. The friends he made on these trips laid the foundation of his later intellectual and social life. Upon the death of his uncle on 24 June 1607, Peiresc took the family seat in the Parlement and occupied it for exactly thirty years (he died on 24 June 1637). For seven of them, he lived in Paris in the entourage of his patron Guillaume du Vair, then Keeper of the Seals, and saw at first hand the workings of a baroque court. Upon returning to Provence in 1623, he never left. For these last fourteen years of his life Peiresc was able, from a provincial headquarters, "to unite all Mankind" – I quote from a contemporary's praise – "through the whole World, by the Commerce and Correspondence of Letters."³ A list of his friends reads like a catalogue of the age's great men and includes Cardinal Francesco Barberini, William Camden, Tomaso Campanella, Isaac Casaubon, Guillaume du Vair, Jacques-Auguste de Thou, Galileo Galilei, Pierre Gassendi, Hugo Grotius, Athanasius Kircher, François Malherbe,

¹ Lecture given at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin on May 28, 1998.

² Umberto Eco, *The Island of the Day Before*, tr. William Weaver (New York, 1995; Italian 1994), p. 153. Exactly preserving posterity's verdict, Eco then refers to the Canon of Digne – a clear reference to Peiresc's dear friend Pierre Gassendi who actually was Canon of Digne. Peiresc's identity must be divined.

Marin Mersenne, Gian-Vicenzo Pinelli, Peter-Paul Rubens, Paolo Sarpi, Joseph Scaliger, and Pope Urban VIII. It was his close relations with the Barberinis and with other cardinals that led to Peiresc's emerging as the spokesman for the scholarly community to plead for the release of Galileo. When an appeal to common humanity did not move Francesco Barberini, Peiresc warned his friend that failure to reverse the verdict "would run the risk of being interpreted and perhaps compared one day to the persecution of the person and wisdom of Socrates, so condemned by other nations and by posterity itself".⁴ Peiresc's death in 1637 was marked by an outpouring of comment across the learned world including an extraordinary memorial meeting in Rome (attended by ten cardinals and assorted Roman luminaries), publication of a volume of elegiac poetry in over forty languages, and the most important biography of a scholar written in the seventeenth century, Pierre Gassendi's *Life of the Illustrious Man*, or, as it was soon known in its English translation, a project of the Hartlib circle and dedicated to John Evelyn, *The Mirrour of True Nobility and Gentility*.

The tens of thousands of pages of letters, copies of letters, memoranda and reading notes that have survived the depredations of time and the carelessness of an unreliable heir map the shape of the Republic of Letters in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Like Peiresc's *Nachlass*, Gassendi's biography could be approached as an intellectual history of the New Thinking in Europe. In these pages we are plunged headlong into the world of an early modern antiquary. Like the great contemporary entrepôts in which the goods of the world were laid side by side, we can here sample the issues, great and small, that drove learned discussion in Europe. Peiresc's correspondents in Europe, Asia and Africa served as his foreign service and he, in Provence, studied their reports and directed them to the most appropriate destination. Peiresc's provincial address was not at all "out of the way", in an age just before the emergence of modern capitals like Paris and London made the term "provincial intellectual" an oxymoron. On the contrary, from his home in Aix, near Marseilles, and country estate in Boysgency, near Toulon, Peiresc bestrode the Rhone and Mediterranean

³ Pierre Gassendi, *The Mirrour of True Nobility and Gentility*, tr. W. Rand (London, 1657), book six, p. 236. This book, first published in 1641 as *Viri Illustris Nicolai Claudii Fabricii de Peiresc, Senatoris Aquisextiensis, Vita* remains the best account of the life. Subsequent biographies, such as Pierre Humbert, *Un Amateur Peiresc 1580–1637* (Paris, 1933) and Georges Cahen-Salvador, *Un Grand Humaniste Peiresc 1580–1637* (Paris, 1951), depend upon it (though neither contain any references).

⁴ Peiresc to Francesco Barberini, 31 January 1635, *Le Opere di Galileo. Edizione Nazionale* (Florence, 1966), XVI, p. 202.

ports that connected the Levant and Italy with France and the Low Countries.

In this archive we read of Peiresc's repetition of Galileo's observation of the moons of Jupiter, the so-called Medicean Planets – with accuracy equal to and sometimes better than his master – which he planned to publish. It was while making these observations in November 1610 that Peiresc trained his telescope, acquired from the same Dutchman who supplied Galileo, at the constellation of Orion. In the sword of Orion Peiresc saw what he described as a little cloud, a *nebulula*. This was the first nebula ever seen.

We also learn of his discovery, or re-discovery, while rummaging through the treasury of the Ste. Chappelle in Paris in 1620, of the Great Cameo of France, the so-called *Gemma Tiberiana*. In contemporary letters to other antiquaries he announced the find and proposed identifications for its twenty-odd characters, many of which are still accepted. It was this discovery that gave Peiresc the idea of doing a book on ancient engraved gems and cameos. To do justice to the subject, the best possible illustrations were to be paired with the most detailed commentary. For the images, Peiresc turned to one of the greatest artist-antiquaries of the period, Peter-Paul Rubens. This was the beginning of an enduring friendship that was sealed with the gift of a self-portrait, now in Canberra, presented to Peiresc in 1628, and one of only two known to be by the painter's own hand. The other was done for King Charles I of England. All that survived of the “gembook”, which was thwarted by Rubens' activities as a Spanish diplomat and Peiresc's inclusion of more and more objects, was Rubens' engraving for the frontispiece.

About Peiresc's next great find we know very little. The “Marmor Parium” is the most famous of the stones purchased in 1624 by Peiresc's agent, the Provençal merchant Samson Napolon, then consul in Smyrna. It contains, in ancient Greek writing, a treaty between two cities in Asia Minor, Magnesia and Smyrna, and dates to the sixth century B.C.E. But before Napoleon could take the stones out of the country, he was thrown in jail and his objects picked up by the quick-witted Thomas Petty, the English Lord Arundel's Turkish treasure-hunter. Through the scholarly efforts of Peiresc's friend, John Selden, the document's value for making sense of ancient chronology was announced to the learned world in the *Marmora Arundelliana* (1628). The stone is a historical-chronological document from the archaic Greek past that these antiquaries thought could finally frame a single world narrative integrating both sacred and profane history.

In Peiresc's correspondence during the year 1628, there is the brief record of a conversation with two travelers recently returned from Persia.

On the ancient route from Ecbatana to Babylon, Monsieurs Leger and le Tenneur – otherwise unknown – had seen a spring rising up at the base of a mountain. The mountain was itself all dressed and figured, according to Peiresc’s account, with an “infinity of beautiful figures”, of grand “histories” – “history” being the word that Leon Battista Alberti had used to refer to relief sculpture in *Della pittura* – all cut into the mountain side in high relief. This was “a very rare and very marvelous work”, Peiresc concluded, and worthy of being copied – though this was not done until 1837. This is one of the first references we have to the images and tri-lingual inscription carved at Bisitun on the order of Darius the Great in 518 B.C.E., and often referred to as the “Rosetta Stone of Western Asia”, since it facilitated study of the languages of Darius’ empire: Old Persian, Babylonian and Elamite. Peiresc observed that the scale of these remains was precisely what one would expect from a mighty empire, that the climate in the East worked to preserve all physical remains that were not intentionally destroyed, and that the general state of depopulation had preserved many things that would otherwise have been worn away by usage. Peiresc suggested that the depictions of tiaras and headgear, such as those of Darius, and the Scythian King Skunkha, might be of use to Rubens. Peiresc had earlier put his knowledge of ancient clothing at Rubens’ disposal for the latter’s paintings of the life of Marie de Medici in the Palais de Luxembourg.

As part of Peiresc’s efforts to establish the longitude of different sites along the shores of the Mediterranean and so correct existing maps, he organized a series of eclipse observations in which he mobilized friends from France to Syria to record the precise times when phenomena appeared. This same ambition led him to commission a map of the moon. When the engraver Claude Mellan stayed at his home in the summer of 1635, Peiresc put him to work on this project.

Peiresc was also responsible for introducing Angora cats to Europe. Gassendi explains that his love of cats began from self-interest: they guarded his scattered manuscripts from the depredations of mice. He soon found they had additional uses, and offered them to other cat-loving antiquaries in exchange for objects they were otherwise reluctant to part with. Peiresc’s other passion, gardening, is documented by the long lists of seeds that he exchanged with botanists around Europe, such as Clusius, who established the first and still-surviving botanical garden in Leiden. Peiresc’s contacts in Asia enabled him to turn his country estate into a nursery where exotic plants like jasmine were first grown in Europe. In recognition of Peiresc’s efforts, at the end of the seventeenth century the botanist royal of France named the oldest families of cactus after him, *Pereskia* and *Pereskioopsis*.

These are some of the more arresting episodes scattered through his papers. But day in and day out it is the study of antiquity through its literary and material remains that dominates the correspondence. A history of antiquarianism would, of course, begin with Petrarch in the fourteenth century and continue through Cyriac of Ancona in the fifteenth to the giants of the generations just preceding Peiresc: Pirro Ligorio and Onufrio Panvinio, and Joseph Scaliger and Justus Lipsius. The salient feature of Peiresc's intellectual profile is his interest in the history of the ancient Near East and medieval Europe, widening the humanists' traditional focus on classical Rome.

Peiresc played a crucial role in the beginning of oriental studies in early seventeenth-century Europe by organizing and funding learned shopping trips through the Levant and by putting newly-acquired information into the hands of specialists in Rome, Paris, Leiden, and Oxford. He used his considerable credit, both personal and financial, to promote the study of Samaritan and Coptic. The study of these and other languages, such as Ethiopic and Phoenician, established the possibility of a historical investigation of the ancient Near East and its relation to Greece. It also marks a deepening in the effort to put the Bible in its historical context that leads, in the next generation, to the work of Simon and Spinoza. It is this broader history of the Mediterranean world that fascinated Peiresc. Working through the French diplomatic, missionary, and commercial community in Cairo, many of whom were fellow Provençaux, Peiresc took advantage of his unrivalled access to information to seek answers to a series of questions about ancient and modern Egypt. It was, for instance, from Cairo that Peiresc received a pot of "sorbet". He described it as somewhat the worse for the wear of travel, with its tartness so dulled that even at half the dilution it failed to recover its piquancy. A study of Peiresc as a critic of exotic foods, which I don't as yet have any desire to write, would also have to discuss a letter to his brother in which he compares strawberries just brought from Quebec with those from his garden.

Constantinople was another capital of Peiresc's overseas empire. His papers preserve some remarkable drawings of the hippodrome, columns of Theodosius and Arcadius and sea-borne views of the city. Again, it was through the network of Provençal merchants and diplomats that Peiresc sought out and obtained information on contemporary Ottoman politics, and also on the natural history and antiquities of the lands ruled from Constantinople. Because Peiresc took such care to have copies made of his outgoing correspondence, this constitutes one of the great troves of information that we have on the early seventeenth-century Ottoman world.

Peiresc's oriental studies could serve as a wonderfully rich and detailed example of the way in which the antiquary's approach to the

study of the daily life and beliefs of past civilizations constituted an early modern version of what later came to be called cultural history by historians, cultural anthropology by anthropologists and comparative literature by literary scholars.

The other pole of Peiresc's intellectual life was Provence, with its glorious medieval culture and political autonomy. Here, his historical study was put in the service of both the King and the Parlement of Provence, providing historical ammunition for contemporary policy-making. Peiresc also served as a member of that Parlement and his political thought can be reconstructed from speeches and documents he preserved, as well as from his close contacts with leading European statesmen such as Paolo Sarpi, Hugo Grotius, and Jacques-Auguste de Thou.

For all this, Peiresc's fame in life was more than matched by an oblivion in death so swift and so complete as to elicit from someone who did not forget him, Pierre Bayle, the judgment that in only fifty years the name Peiresc had been forgotten, even in France. He had already become, in other words, Eco's nameless "local gentleman".

Why then should we now be interested in him? Because Peiresc was an extraordinary figure who typifies, in the extreme, features of the baroque world of early seventeenth-century Europe. In the twentieth century, Arnaldo Momigliano described Peiresc as the "archetype of all antiquarians", and Hugh Trevor-Roper called him "the dynamo which drove the machine of intellectual discussion throughout the Continent".⁵ His fame as an "antiquary" at a time when this practice embraced the study of the natural as well as human past gives us access to an intellectual continent long since sunk from view. The simple fact that someone could be as famous as Peiresc and yet be forgotten so rapidly is the question that sparked off my research. I have tried to answer it, in the book I am writing this year, by reformulating it as another question: what changed in Europe between 1640 and 1690 that led Peiresc to be forgotten, while some of his friends, like Mersenne and Galileo, remained famous?

I am not, however, going to try and address this question now. Instead, I would like to focus on what has been a standard complaint since the seventeenth-century, in other words, for roughly as long as this practice existed: antiquaries study useless things. After the shocking characterizations of the antiquary by Nietzsche and George Eliot (both appearing in 1872), it is commonplace to separate history – philosophy teaching by

⁵ Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990), p. 54; Trevor-Roper, "The Baroque Century", *The Age of Expansion. Europe and the World 1559–1660*, ed. Trevor-Roper, (London, 1969), p. 34.

example – from antiquarianism – desiccated old men studying ruins even drier and even older than themselves. But why did so many, for so long, make such an effort to know so much about so little?

To answer this question we need to think a little about neo-stoicism, the lifestyle that aspired to the status of philosophy and was most fashionable at the turn of the sixteenth century, from roughly 1580–1640, outside of the universities, or at least philosophy faculties, among the aristocrats and scholars who filled minor and major offices in the estates and bureaucracies of Europe's governments.

The central purpose of neo-stoicism, perfectly adapted for its audience, was to instill a “philosophicalness” that could endure calamities both public and personal. A mind able to distinguish between fleeting appearances and enduring truths, and between rational precepts and the irrational dictates of the passions, was one that could achieve tranquility amidst disorder and inner freedom under conditions of external constraint – features painfully familiar to those living during decades of civil and religious wars. Its canonical authors were Seneca and Epictetus among the Ancients, and Justus Lipsius, Guillaume du Vair, and Pierre Charron among the Moderns. It was also a service ideal especially useful to those working for rulers or in courts since it enabled them to survive under regimes, and in conditions, where rulers could act as arbitrarily as nature.

But without minimizing this role, I would like to argue that at the level of the individual scholar, this work on the past could also complement, or even promote the same series of philosophical ends proposed by the modern revivers of Roman stoicism. For the antiquary was confronted daily with the experience that these philosophers wrote about. *Tempus edax rerum tuque invidiosa vetustas omnia destruitis* (“Time devourer of things, and you envious age, destroy all”), Ovid had proclaimed. This was the inescapable truth facing all those who tried to make sense out of the wreckage of the past and emphasized more dramatically than could any purely philosophical apprenticeship the need to be philosophical – as we still say today – about life and its losses.

The confrontation with the past is the theme of a painting that has recently resurfaced and been described as “the most extraordinary painting of Roman ruins ever made in the Renaissance”.⁶ Dominated by that legend from the *Metamorphoses* (XV. 234), this painting by the Frisian artist Hermanus Posthumus (1536), now in the Lichtenstein Collection, is at once an acknowledgement of the inexorable grinding triumph of time and a call for documentation and preservation. This tension lies at the

⁶ Nicole Dacos, “Hermannus Posthumus. Rome, Manuta, Landshut”, *The Burlington Magazine* 127 (1985), p. 438.

heart of the antiquarian enterprise. Tiny figures probe the vast ruins: even the scale is designed to evoke the dynamic of this challenge. These are artist-antiquaries like Posthumus and his friend Maarten van Heemskerck – both of whom actually left their names as graffiti in the *domus aurea* – whose work offered the hope of salvaging something from the wrecked hulk of antiquity. Their belief, presented so unequivocally by Heemskerck, was that the remains of the past offered the best and most accurate matter with which to retell its story. *Roma Quanta Fuit Ipsa Ruina Docet*.

Joachim du Bellay's *Les Antiquités de Rome* (1558), a landmark in the history of the trans-alpine Renaissance, put this visual argument into poetry. He described Rome as "the pray of time, which all things doth devowre". *Tempus Edax Rerum*. The "sacred ruines" and monuments stood witness to a much greater power. "And though your frames do for a time make warre/ Gainst time, yet time in time shall ruinate/ Your workes and names, and your last reliques marre".⁷ Yet, so great was Rome's fame that even "though time doth Commonwealths devowre,/ Yet no time could ever wipe the city from memory."⁸ One could emphasize the role of Rome in generating the trans-alpine Renaissances of the sixteenth century, but here I will only note that I have been quoting du Bellay in the translation of Edmund Spenser, published in 1591.

In his *Ruines of Time*, published in the same collection as this translation, Spenser turned the focus of this reflection on time away from the past and, as in Posthumus, towards those who dedicated themselves to fighting time. Not Rome, but the ruins of Romano-British Verulamium, occasioned the poem. The ancient remains of the city had been discovered in the middle ages and carted off to build the Cathedral of St. Albans. Against time's all-conquering march stood one man, "Camden the nourice of antiquitie/ And lanterne unto late succeeding age". Despite "fortunes injurie,/ And times decay, and envies cruell tort", William Camden, the great English antiquary and titular head of the Elizabethan Society of Antiquaries – as well as Peiresc's chief English contact – had succeeded in resuscitating the memory of the ancient city in his chorographic masterpiece *Britannia*. In

⁷ Spenser, *Ruines of Rome: by Bellay, The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, eds. William A. Oram et al. (New Haven and London, 1989), VII, p. 389; Joachim du Bellay, *Les Antiquitez*, in *Les Antiquitez de Rome. Les Regrets*, ed. Françoise Joukovsky (Paris, 1994), VII, p. 40: "Et bien qu'au temps pour un temps facent guerre/Les bastiments, si est-ce que le temps/Oeuvres et noms finablement atterre."

⁸ Spenser, *Ruines of Rome*, VIII, p. 390; du Bellay, *Les Antiquitez*, p. 31: "Et que, si bien le temps destruit les Republicques./ Le temps ne mist si bas la Romaine hauteur ..."

his celebration of it Spenser prophesied, “*Cambden*, though time all monuments obscure, / yet thy just labours shall endure”.⁹

In his preface to *Britannia*, Camden described himself as if locked in a contest with time. He wanted to “rake out, and free from darknesse such places as... TIME hath overcast with mist and darknesse”. Camden further excused the errors he might have made by asking, rhetorically, “For who is so skilfull that struggling with TIME in the foggie dark sea of Antiquity may not run upon rockes?”¹⁰ When encouraging others to publish their research on Anglo-Saxon, Camden noted that without publication “it is to be feared that devouring Time in few yeeres will utterly swallow it, without hope of recoverie”.¹¹

The most serious and evocative effort to define the practice of antiquarianism as a contest against time and to explain its appeal was made by Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Knowledge*. He defined “antiquities” as “history defaced, or remnants of history which have casually escaped the shipwreck of time”. “*Antiquities*, or remnants of histories, are (as was said) like the spars of a shipwreck: when, though the memory of things be decayed and almost lost, yet acute and industrious persons, by a certain perseverance and scrupulous diligence, contrive to recover somewhat from the deluge of time”.¹²

Bacon’s phrase – or the general idea – had long become commonplace. In Shackerley Mermion’s perceptive parody, *The Antiquary* (1641), *Veteranno*, the eponymous anti-hero, has his servant recite, as if a credo, that antiquities were to be venerated because “rarities” “snatched from the jaws of time”.¹³ If we look closely at these remarks we can see that, as in the painting of Posthumus, this struggle of the historian against time not only animates an intellectual practice, but also gives expression to extremely personal feelings of motivation, of the sort that are rarely put in words anywhere, least of all in a scholarly genre notoriously short on the first person.

Let us take one almost local example, from the extended circle of Peiresc, the Silesian poet Martin Opitz (1597–1639). He began his studies in Breslau and then, like so many Protestants, continued them in Heidel-

⁹ Spenser, *Ruines of Time*, ll. 166–76, p. 240.

¹⁰ William Camden, *Britain, or a chorographicall description of the most flourishing kingdoms, England, Scotland and Ireland*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1610), fols. 2^rv, 3^r, 3^v.

¹¹ Camden, “On language”, *Remaines Concerning Britain*, (Toronto, Ontario, 1984), p. 27.

¹² Francis Bacon, *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, bk. II, ch. 6.

¹³ Shackerley Mermion, *The Antiquary* (London, 1641), sig. D4^v.

berg, in his case with Janus Gruter. He fled the Spanish sack of the Palatinate in 1620 and passed through Leiden, where he became friends with Daniel Heinsius, and Denmark, where, in windswept and libraryless Jutland he composed his *Trostgedichte in Widerwertigkeit des Krieges* (not published until 1633), described as one of the earliest and most important receptions of neo-stoicism in German literature.¹⁴ The familiar theme of attaining inner freedom through rational self-control in spite of a hostile world is set against the backdrop of a Europe torn by war. It was once subtitled “Über die Beständigkeit”, while *Widerwertigkeit des Krieges* echoed Lipsius’s *De Constantia seu consolatio in publicis malis* and du Vair’s *De la Constance in calamitez publiques* but now with the backdrop of the Thirty Years’ War, rather than the Revolt of the Netherlands or French Wars of Religion.

From Denmark, Opitz wandered to the other end of Europe and the court of Bethlen Gabor in Transylvania. It was there, in 1622, that he wrote a poem that makes clear the intimate relations between the study of antiquities and neo-stoicism. What is extraordinary about *Zlatna oder von der Ruhe deß Gemüthes*, subtitled after Seneca in the appended panegyric poetry “De tranquillitate animi”, is not its typical reflections on the vanity of the world, or its equally typical favorable description of country as opposed to courtly life, but its recruitment of antiquarianism to make a philosophical argument.

For Opitz was not, as in du Bellay’s words, the “stranger which for Rome in Rome here seekest/ And nought of Rome in Rome perceiv’st at all”. Opitz found Rome where he was not expecting to find it.¹⁵ It is the shock of seeing Roman ruins in Transylvania – and like a good student of Gruter, he carefully copied down inscriptions, printed them in the notes to the poem and sent them on to Gruter himself – that led Opitz to imagine his own urn full of funereal ashes and to think hard about the best life to lead before that inevitable end; the poem is about the good life. Poussin’s near-contemporary painting of shepherds coming upon an ancient monument warning them of their own deaths – the meaning, according to Panofsky, of the first, Chattsworth, version of “Et in Arcadia Ego” – is the visual expression of this relationship between antiquarianism and being “philosophical” that is one of the main themes in *Zlatna*.¹⁶

¹⁴ Klaus Garber, “Martin Opitz”, *Deutsche Dichter des 17. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Harald Steinhagen and Benno von Wiese (Berlin, 1984), p. 152.

¹⁵ The words are du Bellay’s famous ones in Spenser’s translation from the 3rd of his *Antiquitez* (“Nouveau venu, qui cherches Rome en Rome/ Et rien de Rome en Rome n’apperçois”).

These ruins, and the contrast with the peasant folk who lived amongst them, prompted Opitz' observation that living according to reason and nature was best. This was opposed to those, he wrote, who "bawen auff den schein des schnöden wesens nicht/ Das beydes nur die zeit gebietet und zubricht."¹⁷ Learning about the past defeated the tyranny of time. Opitz described this triumph as a kind of "spiritual exercise", of the sort recommended by ancient stoics like Epictetus and Seneca, as well as modern ones like Lipsius. "Das wolt' ich gleichfalls thun/ und meines geistes kräfte/ Versuch allezeit mit müßigen geschäften;/ Ich liesse nicht vortbey so viel man künste weiß/ Und was man helt vor schwer erstieg' ich durch den fleiß." The specific form of intellectual inquiry that best expressed this effort was the study of antiquities. Opitz continued: "Der Länder untergang/ der alten Völker sitten/ Ihr essen'jhre tracht/ wie seltsam sie gestritten/ Wo diß und das geschehen/ ja aller zeiten stand/ Von anbegin der Welt macht' ich mir gantz bekend".¹⁸

This is nothing less than the kind of encyclopedic antiquarian project that someone like Peiresc would have recognized at once. Opitz harnessed it to a vision of the "happy man" that is better known as a late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century phenomenon and which, in any event, is rarely connected with the world of knowledge.

The work *Zlatna* announced, and discussion of which recurs in Opitz's correspondence, *Dacia Antiqua*, is lost and may never have been completed. (In 1629, Grotius did, however, forward some of Opitz's researches to Peiresc who admired them, but without mention of Opitz as the author). What has survived of Opitz's plans describes a typical piece of antiquarian scholarship that used objects as well as texts to write a history embracing the historico-geographical and cultural-historical alike.¹⁹ Using observations of the contemporary situation – there are many comments about the language and customs of the Romanian inhabitants of Zlatna – as a tool for understanding Roman Dacia, it provides us with a perfect example of the relationship between antiquarianism and early anthropology that Momigliano hinted at.

For someone like Camden, or Peiresc, this kind of layered knowledge of the past offered the prospect of living in the world on terms of greater

¹⁶ Opitz, *Zlatna, Oder von Ruhe deß Gemüthes*, in *Opitz Gesammelte Werke*, ed. George Schulz-Behrend (Stuttgart, 1978), pp. 75–77. Erwin Panofsky, "Et in Arcadia Ego", *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, NY, 1955), p. 312.

¹⁷ Opitz, *Zlatna*, ll. 513–16.

¹⁸ Opitz, *Zlatna*, ll. 521–28.

¹⁹ See Walter Gose, "*Dacia Antiqua*. Ein verschollenes Hauptwerk von Martin Opitz", *Südostdeutsches [sic] Archiv*, 2 (1959), pp. 127–144, at p. 136.

familiarity – or at least less estrangement. Camden explained to those who condemned the study of Antiquity as a “back-looking curiosity” that this knowledge alone offered the possibility of really living. “If any there be which are desirous to be strangers in their owne soile, and forrainers in their owne City, they may so continue and therein flatter themselves”. If it was knowledge of a country’s or a people’s past, rather than a mere legal title, that made one a true citizen, it was also true that ignorance of the past diminished the meaning of life itself.²⁰ According to Gassendi, Peiresc “could hardly well endure to see an ingenuous man, who was a stranger in his own world”. This was why he had himself studied the histories of all nations so that, Gassendi concluded in his *Life of Peiresc*, he seemed as if one who had lived at all times in all places.²¹ This was Peiresc’s way of attaining what Daniello Bartoli in his *Man of Learning Defended* (1646) intended in his extraordinary remark that “to know the world is to possess it”.

This blending of antiquarian practice with neo-stoic reflection on change is given its purest seventeenth-century English – and perhaps European – expression in Thomas Browne’s *Hydriotaphia. Urne Burriall, or a discourse of the sepulchrall urnes lately found in Norfolk* (1658), an apt pendant to Zlatna from the other end of Europe. The urns were “sad and sepulchral Pitchers... the ruines of forgotten times”. The presence of antiquities, he wrote in the dedication, just as Opitz wrote in his, “raiseth your thoughts unto old things, and consideration of times before you”. Like the “Todtentopff” that Opitz saw amidst the Roman gravestones and imagined being filled with his own ashes, Browne saw the urns as “artificial *mementos*, or coffins by our bedside, to minde us of our graves”. Just as Opitz described inscriptions that had withstood time, weather, and fire, Browne noted that “Time which antiquates Antiquities, and hath an art to make dust of all things, hath yet spared these *minor* Monuments”. Yet these ashes, which, unlike Opitz’s stones, gave no indication of their formerly living contents, survived only “as Emblemes of mortall vanities; Antidotes against pride, vain-glory, and madding vices”.²²

For Browne, however, and this is an important turning point, even the antiquary’s most conscientious effort had to fail because “there is no antidote against the Opium of time”. Parents were buried in the memories of their children and children now alive in that of those yet unborn. “To be read by bare Inscriptions like many in *Gruter*” – referring to the *Inscrip-*

²⁰ Camden, *Britain*, fol. 2^{r-v}.

²¹ Gassendi, *Mirroure*, bk. 6, pp. 202–203.

²² Sir Thomas Browne, “Hydriotaphia”, *The Religio Medici and other writings* (London, 1947), pp. 92–3; 131–33.

tiones totius orbi romanarum corpus (1601) of Opitz's teacher – "to hope for Eternity by Ænigmaticall Epithetes or first letters of our names [as in inscriptions], to be studied by Antiquaries, who we were, and have new Names given us like many of the Mummies, are cold consolations unto the Students of perpetuity".²³

Browne's lament for the inevitably superficial quality of what later scholarship could preserve of earlier lived life – the cold consolation – is the subject of Keats's own lament for the "foster-child of silence and slow time" in "Ode on a Grecian Urn". The who and what depicted on the vase – the antiquary's stock questions – could never be answered. The past was just *too* distant. Where Hegel, in some of the most beautiful passages in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* described this reality as the limit of one form of historical understanding – antiquarianism – and marking the necessity of another, Keats turned the triumph of "old age" – the mellower cousin of Ovid's *invidiosa vetustas* – into a new, noncontextual notion of the beautiful. He concluded, against the antiquarian aesthetic of someone like the Comte de Caylus, though the verdict falls also on Opitz and Peiresc, that "beauty is truth and truth beauty". This, and not history, was all that anyone needed to know.

I have tried to show that in Peiresc's circle study of the past was part of a broader approach to the question of living well aimed at making men "philosophical", and so able to bear adversity and enjoy good fortune with equanimity. "Ancient history" and "the antiquarian", to borrow the title of Momigliano's classic study, may have eventually gone their separate ways, but in the heroic age of the antiquaries they drew from the "shipwreck of antiquity" the same philosophical sustenance that others drew from Thucydides or Livy. The ability of scholars like Peiresc to hold the past in their hands, whether in the shape of coins or sculptures, gave them a much more immediate sense of time's passage and the frailty of all things human, a frailty which, nevertheless, their prodigious labors sought to overcome. It is the fearlessness of this passion for learning that never lost itself in either self-admiration or self-pity that is the best demonstration of how, at least for Peiresc, the study of antiquities could be a guide to living, *magistra vitae*.

²³ Browne, *Hydriotaphia*, p. 134.