

THE “COLONIA STRANIERA” OF ANTIQUITIES’ COLLECTORS IN CAPRI BETWEEN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

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During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, drawn by the attraction of its distinctive combination of natural splendor and historical charm, the island of Capri became a favored place of residence for what archival records refer to as the “*colonia straniera*”. Among the members of this international community, several individuals shared a passion for collecting: Haan Antal (from Hungary), Jean Benner (from France), Charles Caryl Coleman and John Clay MacKowen (from the United States of America), Axel Martin Fredrik Munthe (from Sweden). Their insular dwellings housed heterogeneous collections, in which antiquities – both unearthed locally and imported – occupied a prominent place.

A comparative analysis of the collecting practices that these *amateurs* implemented proves particularly interesting, as it allows for the identification of intriguing points of convergence, despite the existence of unique features; moreover, broadening the perspective beyond Capri’s borders, a vivid affinity emerges with habits revealed by other foreign collectors who simultaneously lived elsewhere in Italy, especially in the neighbouring Sorrentine Peninsula. Finally, an overview of the different destinies that these collections underwent after the deaths of their creators invites reflections on the current legacy of this historical, cultural, and social experience for the island of Capri.

«Les chapitres qui suivent évoquent quelques collections et leurs propriétaires.
Ce petit choix ne veut en aucun cas décrire toutes les espèces de collectionneurs.
Il s'agit juste de quelques personnages qui ont pu m'intéresser, m'intriguer ou m'amuser»

(LE-TAN 2013, p. 11)

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Over the past decade, scientific inquiry has recognised the island of Capri as an exceptionally fertile ground for the investigation of antiquarian phenomena spanning from the 1700s to the 1900s, encompassing both excavation activities¹ and collecting activities². With regard to the latter, it is especially compelling to shift the focus away from individual figures and instead consider a community, specifically an international one, whose members – active more or less concurrently – partook in the same geographical and chronological frame: Capri between the last thirty years of the nineteenth century and the first fifty years of the twentieth century.

The main goal of the present survey is to examine the ‘collecting behaviour’ of these foreign residents in Italy, with particular attention to highlight potential similarities and/or differences among them. While the analysis is centred on Capri, it is important to acknowledge that a comparative approach would be even more fruitful if extended beyond the boundaries of the Campanian island³. Nevertheless, it seems most appropriate to begin by briefly clarifying the historical dynamics that, at that time, led to the formation of the so-called “*colonia straniera*” on Capri.

From the spark of the Eternal City to the charm of the Sirens’ Island

Even prior to the 19th century, Capri experienced a sort of ‘cultured tourism’, albeit sporadically; the erudite Jean-Jacques Bouchard⁴ from France, who visited the island as early as 1632⁵, may be considered a pioneer in this sense. However, throughout the 18th century, the *Grand Tour* typically concluded in Naples, and only a few travellers ventured further to Capri, deterred by the logistical challenges of the crossing. On this point, a notable case is provided by the literatus Johann Wolfgang von Goethe⁶ from Germany, who in 1787 narrowly escaped shipwreck off the island’s coast, a dramatic episode he later recounted in his “*Italianische Reise*”⁷.

1. Refer to DI FRANCO 2021 for the archaeological researches during the Bourbon era; refer to DI FRANCO 2023 for the fieldwork experiences during the second quarter of the twentieth century.

2. Refer to DI FRANCO - DI MARTINO 2018a for the antiquities collectors operating during the 19th and 20th centuries.

3. Cfr. *infra*.

4. On Jean-Jacques Bouchard see, lastly, CAVALLÉ 2014.

5. «Le 17 Mai [1632]. Parti de Naples pour Capri à 13 heures du matin, dans une feluca sottile. Il y a trente mille de chemin. L'on cognoit en avoir fait la moitié lors que l'on peut voir la separation de Procyta et Ischia, qui auparavant semblent estre conjointes. La barque, ayant tiré du mole à Capri tousjours en droite ligne, se treuva en cet endroit là justement au centre et milieu du golfe [...]. Entre Capri et Ischia est la mer seulement [...]. Capri est une isle qui n'a pas plus de sept à huit mille de tour, plus longue que large. [...] Le 19 Mai [1632] [...] treuvé la commodité d'une barque qui partoit pour Salerne» (Paris B-AP, ms. 502, cc. 47-r, 48-r, 53-v published in KANCEFF 1976-1977, II, pp. 228-229, 234).

6. On Johann Wolfgang von Goethe see, lastly, WILSON 2024.

7. «Montag den 14. May 1787. [...] Wir wurden [...] immer westwärts getrieben und das Schiff, indem es sich der Insel Capri näherte, entfernte sich immer mehr von dem Kap Minerva. [...] Links lag Capri steil in die Höhe strebend; die Formen seiner Felswände konnten wir durch den durchsichtigen, bläulichen Dunst vollkommen unterscheiden. [...] Den Uebergang vorn Abend zur Nacht verfolgten [...]. Capri lag nun ganz

Thereafter, in 1826, the German artist August Kopisch⁸ and his compatriot painter Adam Friedrich Carl Ernst Fries⁹, guided by the Italian notary Giuseppe Pagano¹⁰ – Capri’s first hotelier, founder of the *Locanda Pagano* in 1822 –, were protagonists of the (re)discovery of the Blue Grotto¹¹: this event, along with its account¹², undoubtedly marks the birth of Capri’s tourist appeal in modern epoch.

From that moment onward, Capri’s allure, widely disseminated through various visual media (fig. 1)¹³, attracted an ever-growing number of foreigners¹⁴. This fascination – rooted in a dual dimension, with an unspoiled natural beauty of a scarcely inhabited landscape on one hand, and a layered history imbued with almost mythical characteristics on the other – inspired many to dwell on the Campanian island, for shorter or longer periods. Among those expressly relevant to the topic of collecting, five figures stand out: the Hungarian painter Haan Antal¹⁵ (1827-1888); the French painter Jean Benner (1836-1906)¹⁶; the American painter Charles Caryl Coleman¹⁷ (1840-1928); the American colonel and physician John Clay MacKowen¹⁸ (1842-1901); the Swedish physician Axel Martin Fredrik Munthe¹⁹ (1857-1949).

finster vor uns [...] wir unbemerkt gelassen daß uns ein großes Unheil bedrohe [...] bemerkten wir doch daß das Schiff, schwankend und schwippend, sich den Felsen näherte, die immer finsterner vor uns standen [...]. Immer stärker schwankte das Schiff, die Brandung schien sich zu vermehren und meine durch alles dieses wiederkehrende Seekrankheit drängte mir den Entschluß auf, hinunter in die Kajüte zu steigen. [...] Nach einer kleinen Weile [...]. Vom Verdeck sah ich mit Vergnügen die Insel Capri in ziemlicher Entfernung zur Seite liegen [...]. Bald ließen wir jene gefährliche Felseninsel hinter uns» (GOETHE 1816-1817, II, pp. 364-367, 372-374).

8. On August Kopisch see, lastly, COSTADURA 2022.

9. On Adam Friedrich Carl Ernst Fries see, lastly, MYSSOK 2019.

10. On Giuseppe Pagano see, lastly, D’ANNA 2018, pp. 153-154.

11. About the Blue Grotto as archaeological site on Capri consult BELLI 1998; furthermore, consult DI FRANCO 2022, pp. 29-39 (with previous bibliography).

12. Indeed, the autobiographical narration of this adventurous undertaking was divulged, not long after, through a text that soon gained remarkable resonance nearly everywhere: KOPISCH 1838.

13. Cfr. LA PAGLIA 2019, pp. 114-115 (with previous bibliography).

14. As an integral part of the process, it should be noted that a daily round-trip steamship connecting with Naples – minimum number of passengers and/or weather permitting – was finally established starting from 1869 (DE ANGELIS BERTOLOTI 2001, pp. 12-14).

15. On Haan Antal (Eastern name order according to Hungarian anthroponomastics) see TUROK MARGIT 1988, BERECHKY 2003, SZILÁGYI 2015-2016, DI FRANCO 2018b, *passim*.

16. On Jean Benner see D’ANNA 2018, *passim*.

17. On Charles Caryl Coleman see *Visions Italy* 1988, BELL 2014, BELL 2015, BELL 2016, DI FRANCO 2018a, BELL 2021.

18. On John Clay MacKowen see PALOMBI CATALDI 2012, LA PAGLIA 2018a, LA PAGLIA 2018b.

19. On Axel Martin Fredrik Munthe see MUNTHE - UEXKÜLL-SCHWERIN 1951, *Axel Munthe* 1957, THYLANDER 1962, MORETTI 1964, pp. 327-331, ANDRÉN 1965, GENSCHOREK 1989, HELLQVIST 1990, PROVENZANO 1994, PAVESE 1997, ERDEÖS 1998, *Axel Munthe* 1999, JANGFELDT 2000, JANGFELDT 2001, FRECCERO 2003, JANGFELDT 2003, JANGFELDT 2004, BONDEVIK 2007, HEDLUND 2007, SAHLIN 2007, STEINFELD 2007, LINDÉN 2009, FABRE 2012, DI MARTINO 2018b, BRÄTENIUS - MARTINELLE 2020, ROSENHOLM 2024.



Fig. 1. August Kopisch, *Capri*, oil on wood panel, [1826-1827]
(Paris, *Fondation Custodia* / *Collection Frits Lugt*, inv. 2019-S.25).

They differed in their countries of origin, life trajectories, and – to some extent – their professional backgrounds; nevertheless, they shared a significant commonality, that prior to settling in Capri, one of their stages in Italy was Rome. Indeed, the *Urbs Aeterna* was instrumental in initiating or at least fostering their collecting affairs. The city offered a vibrant context, animated by auctions, dealers, and markets specialising in both national and international antiquities and artworks; it also hosted skilled workshops that produced newly desirable items, copies, and even forgeries²⁰.

For two of the collectors discussed here, there is valuable evidence confirming a primary Roman phase of their collections. Thus, the scholar-politician Zsilinszky Mihály²¹ of Békéscsaba reported in 1874-1875, in the journal *A Békésvármegyei Régészeti és Mivelődéstörténelmi Társulat Évkönyve*, just a small hint about Haan Antal, recording that «adatott át a közönség használatára a megyei museum [Békéscsaba, *Munkácsy Mihály Múzeum*], melyet id. [...] és a Rómából hazarándult Haan Antal keze ügyesen állított össze»²². In contrast, an anonymous New Yorker author described in 1884, in the magazine *The Decorator and Furnisher*, the “Roman studio” of Charles Caryl Coleman:

20. The exhibition catalogue edited by PELLEGRINI 2017 offers a skilful portrayal of that fervent microcosm.

21. On Zsilinszky Mihály (Eastern name order according to Hungarian anthroponomastics) see, lastly, DUSNOKI-DRASKOVICH 2011.

22. ZSILINSZKY 1874-1875, p. 11.

As I pass from the outer to inner room amid pictures, bric-a-brac, *roba di Roma*, more truly di *mondo*, I am bewildered with their beauty and quaintness. [...] Hanging from the ceiling are brass and silver lamps of strange forms [...]. The walls are covered with many and many a thing of beauty, every part of the earth from Norway to Japan having contributed something toward the embellishment of this artist’s workshop, this most artistic studio²³.

It was located at 33 via Margutta. Interestingly, the same street was home to numerous antiquarian shops, then including those operated by relatives of the Jandolo family – at 51/a and 53/a via Margutta –, which became quite renowned that Charles Caryl Coleman had dealings with it even after moving to Capri, as some documents clearly reveal²⁴.

In fact, the connection to Rome’s collecting market persisted for all five *amateurs* in question, despite their relocation to the Campanian island, as demonstrated by in-depth research into the provenance of certain objects that once belonged to their collections²⁵.

Houses and museums alike

Following their Roman interludes, Jean Benner (in 1866), Haan Antal (in 1873?), John Clay MacKowen (in 1876), Charles Caryl Coleman (in 1886), Axel Martin Fredrik Munthe (in 1896) – listed in chronological order – settled in Capri. For each of them, establishing on the island involved assuming the role of ‘architect’, overseeing the construction of their own residences: *Villa Due Pini*²⁶, *Villa Il Fortino*²⁷, *Villa Narcissus*²⁸, *Casa Rossa*²⁹, *Villa San Michele*³⁰ respectively. Although each building possesses its degree of peculiarity, they share several intriguing decorative features – for example, neo-Islamic elements are distinguishable in both *Villa Narcissus* and *Casa Rossa* –; more broadly, they are ascribed to the architectural trend known as Eclecticism³¹. And ‘eclecticism’ also aptly describes the defining attribute of the collections assembled within these mansions.

Rather than probing single items, scrutinising the categories of objects allows for a more meaningful assessment of potential commonalities among the assemblages. At first glance, what plainly emerges and ideally links the five owners is

23. *Roman studio* 1884, pp. 86-87.

24. See DI FRANCO 2018a, pp. 104-105.

25. Cfr. *infra*.

26. A concise overview of *Villa Due Pini* – at 73 via Roma, Capri – is provided by FIORANI 2013, pp. 199-200.

27. A concise overview of *Villa Il Fortino* – at 40 via Palazzo a Mare, Capri – is provided by FIORANI 1996, pp. 89-93, FIORANI 2002, pp. 197-208, and FIORANI 2013, pp. 223-226.

28. A concise overview of *Villa Narcissus* – at 29-31 via Madre Serafina, Capri – is provided by FIORANI 1996, pp. 155-165, FIORANI 2002, pp. 315-325, and FIORANI 2013, pp. 311-316.

29. A concise overview of *Casa Rossa* – at 78 via Giuseppe Orlandi, Anacapri – is provided by FIORANI 1996, pp. 199-201, FIORANI 2002, pp. 413-417, and FIORANI 2013, pp. 93-96.

30. A concise overview of *Villa San Michele* – at 34 viale Axel Munthe, Anacapri – is provided by FIORANI 1996, pp. 207-214, FIORANI 2002, pp. 425-433, and FIORANI 2013, pp. 391-398.

31. Cfr. MANGONE 2017, p. 224 (with previous bibliography).

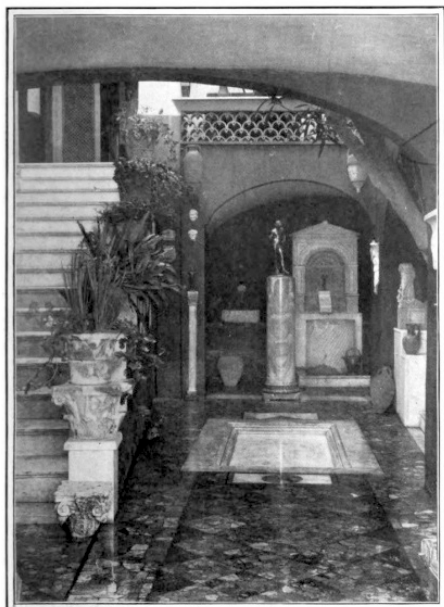


Fig. 2. [Charles de Kay], *The bottom of the courtyard, with the cistern in the floor; the oleander in the upper right-hand corner; and the figure of Narcissus in the background*, photograph, 1902 (after DE KAY 1902, fig. 3 on p. 75).

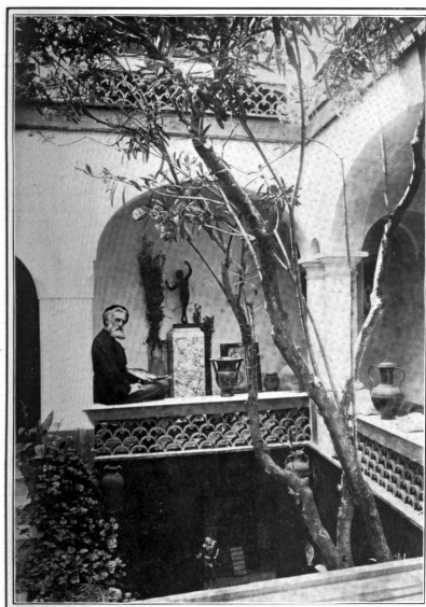


Fig. 3. [Charles de Kay], *“The courtyard where the oleander grows.” The artist seated on the parapet is Mr. Charles Caryl Coleman*, photograph, 1902 (after DE KAY 1902, fig. 2 on p. 73).

their mutual taste for antiquities. Such a passion, among other things, was further fueled by the opportunity to conduct excavations on their properties, a practice made possible by the lack of a robust legal framework for cultural heritage in the newly unified Italian state³². Hence, these foreigners were not only ‘dilettante architects’, but also ‘dilettante archaeologists’.

However, the search for artefacts did not merely satisfy personal curiosity or amusement; in fact, the presence of modern copies of specific ancient artworks within their collections suggests a conscious intention to appropriate the Antique, an act that reflects both aesthetic admiration and historical ambition. Therefore, in Charles Caryl Coleman’s house «Just beyond beneath an arch stands a fine duplicate of the Narcissus which is the boast of the Naples Museum [*Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli*], and gives the villa its name» (fig. 2)³³; a reproduction of the Dancing Faun was also present (fig. 3). Both bronze copies are lost; the bronze originals were unearthed at the archaeological site of Pompeii – the Narcissus from the House of the Statue of

32. For the difficulties in codifying a coherent and, above all, standardised normative system inherent to the protection of archaeological heritage in the aftermath of the Unification of Italy, consult Guzzo 2001.

33. DE KAY 1902, p. 74.



Fig. 4. [Anonymous], *Hermes*, bronze, late 19th century (Anacapri, *Villa San Michele*, inv. 298).

Narcissus (VII 12, 17; 21) and the Faun from the House of the Faun (VI 12, 1-3; 5; 7-8) – and conserved in the archaeological museum of Naples³⁴, likewise the bronze Resting Hermes statue from the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, which was – and still is – replicated in Axel Martin Fredrik Munthe’s house (fig. 4)³⁵. Moreover, *Villa San Michele* exhibited – and continues to exhibit – reproductions of the *Cave Canem* mosaic from the House of the Tragic Poet (VI 8, 3; 5) at Pompeii³⁶, the *Carpe Diem* mosaic from the House of the Lion (VI 17, 23-26) at Pompeii³⁷, and the Sandalbinder marble relief from the Athena Nike Temple on the Acropolis of Athens (fig. 5)³⁸, demonstrating the possessor’s acquaintance with celebrated masterpieces of ancient Greek and Roman art.

Beyond the antiquities component, a few documents help to outline, at least in general terms, the overall appearance of these heterogeneous collections. Me-

dieval and Renaissance artworks, seventeenth-century furniture, Islamic artefacts, books, paintings, tapestries, weapons, and other items were gathered – often in similar fashion – by the five foreign *amateurs*. They pursued a shared rationale: to decorate their dwellings in an astonishing manner. Thus, the *décor* was essentially the driving force behind the creation and development of these ‘private museums’.

The very concept of “museum” – *lato sensu*, quoting the definition given by the French intellectual Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy³⁹ in the second tome

34. Naples, *Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli*, invv. 5002 (bronze Dancing Faun statue: HAUG 2020, p. 61), 5003 (bronze Narcissus statue: STÄHLI 2023, pp. 72-73, Abb. 9).

35. Copy = Anacapri, *Villa San Michele*, inv. 298: DI MARTINO 2018b, pp. 128, 131, 137 note 103. Original = Naples, *Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli*, inv. 5625: *Villa Papi* 2019, CAMARDO - NOTOMISTA 2024, p. 1031.

36. Copy = Anacapri, *Villa San Michele*, inv. 333: IASIELLO 2017, p. 334. Original = Pompeii, *Parco Archeologico di Pompei*, no inv.: DE CAROLIS - ESPOSITO - FERRARA 2019.

37. Copy = Anacapri, *Villa San Michele*, inv. 343: IASIELLO 2017, p. 334. Original = Naples, *Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli*, inv. 9978: SUMMERS et al. 2020, fig. 1 on p. 115.

38. Copy = Anacapri, *Villa San Michele*, inv. n.a.: DI MARTINO 2018b, p. 131. Original = Athens, *Μουσείο Ακρόπολης*, inv. Akp. 973: VALLADARES 2024, pp. 177-179, fig. 6.

39. On Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy see, lastly, GILKS 2024 and SALOM 2024.



Fig. 5. [Anonymous], *Nike*, stone, 19th century
(Anacapri, *Villa San Michele*, inv. n.a.).

of the subject matter *Architecture* within the *Encyclopédie méthodique...* dated 1801, as «un bâtiment, où se trouvent rassemblés les divers objets d'art dont on fait des collections»⁴⁰ – occurs in co-eval sources: for instance, the American writer Charles Augustus de Kay stated, regarding Charles Caryl Coleman, that «the Villa Narcissus is really a little museum in its way»⁴¹; besides, the Italian polymath Edwin Cerio⁴² asserted, regarding John Clay MacKowen, that *Casa Rossa* was not simply a residence «non resistendo [John Clay MacKowen] alla smania di far della sua casa, posta all'entrata del paese [of Anacapri], un museo»⁴³. And the full awareness that

led the collectors to assemble objects not only for furnishing purposes but simultaneously to expand their collections is further exemplified by John Clay MacKowen himself, who typed in a missive: «I have four collections, one of rare books, another of rare arms, a third of majolica and porcelain and a fourth of antique Greek and Roman statues bas reliefs, inscriptions etc.»⁴⁴.

In effect, the mutual interaction between *décor* and collection, which characterises house-museums in the second half of the 19th century, is now a distinctly recognised manifestation⁴⁵.

A non-isolated environment

The small community of foreign collectors on Capri, where certainly everyone knew one another, nurtured both camaraderie and competition. On the one hand, friendships were cultivated, as corroborated by the exchange of artefacts between Haan Antal and John Clay MacKowen⁴⁶; on the other hand, tensions occasionally surfaced, such as the (ultimately unfulfilled) duel between the American colonel and

40. QUATREMÈRE DE QUINCY 1788-1825, II, p. 741.

41. DE KAY 1902, p. 91.

42. On Edwin Cerio see, lastly, DI MARTINO 2018a, *passim*.

43. CERIO 1950, p. 236.

44. Letter from John Clay MacKowen to John Huguet Pike, Capri, December 9th, 1897 (Capri B CCIC, *Fondo John Clay MacKowen*, 5119-5120 partially published in LA PAGLIA 2018a, p. 53).

45. Such a custom has been insightfully addressed by LEVI 2017.

46. See DI FRANCO 2018b, pp. 141-142, 146-147, 149-150, LA PAGLIA 2018a, pp. 65-66, 86-87, catt. MK.B.03, MK.B.04, MK.B.05a-c, and LA PAGLIA 2018b, pp. 313, 315-316, catt. MK.B.03, MK.B.04, MK.B.05a-c.

Axel Martin Fredrik Munthe⁴⁷. Nonetheless, this community did not confine itself within the insular borders, but rather opened up to a wider antiquarian *milieu*; such outward engagement is sharply detectable through the correspondence between John Clay MacKowen and Ferdinando Colonna⁴⁸, who was *Reale Ispettore degli Scavi e Monumenti antichi del Circondario di Napoli* and an archaeological collector himself⁴⁹, or through the epistolary between Charles Caryl Coleman and Stanford White⁵⁰, who was an eminent architect and an international antiques agent⁵¹. Indeed, the five foreign *amateurs* based in Capri were actively involved in the import-export collecting network, both within Italy and abroad⁵². Yet their methods were not always entirely licit; in relation to this, a pair of archival files dated back to 1900 is particularly noteworthy.

A dossier from May-June details an incident concerning five packages containing ancient sculptures and mosaics, sent by Achille D’Andrea in Rome to Filippo Lembo⁵³ in Naples, where the shipment was intercepted by a station master at the railway station due to the absence of an export license. Upon review, the *Ministero della Istruzione Pubblica* determined that no legal proceedings would be commenced, since the materials were not judged to be of significant value; instead, only the payment of the export tax was required. In this situation, Giulio de Petra⁵⁴, President of the *Real Ufficio delle Esportazioni di Oggetti d’Arte e di Antichità per le Provincie Meridionali nel Museo Nazionale di Napoli*, provided an important elucidation (fig. 6):

si è presentato a quest’ufficio stamane non il Sig. Filippo Lembo, al quale i marmi medesimi erano diretti, ma il Dr. Axel Munthe [Axel Martin Fredrik Munthe], acquirente che, invitato a pagare la contravvenzione al Sovrano Editto 7 aprile 1820 [*Editto Pacca*] in Lire 239,50, secondo il valore de’ predetti marmi, egli si è rifiutato, dicendo che siffatta contravvenzione non riguarda lui, ma lo speditore a nome D’Andrea [Achille D’Andrea], che abita costà [in Rome] in Piazza di Termini n. 8⁵⁵.

Another dossier from October-November details a separate incident concerning eight boxes containing a Renaissance stone chimney and assorted furnishings, sent under a false declaration by Romualdo Mosconi from Vetralla (a town in the province

47. See LA PAGLIA 2018a, p. 58.

48. On Ferdinando Colonna see, lastly, IASIELLO 2017, p. 104, note 156.

49. See LA PAGLIA 2018a, pp. 66-67.

50. On Stanford White see, lastly, HAWTHORNE 2025.

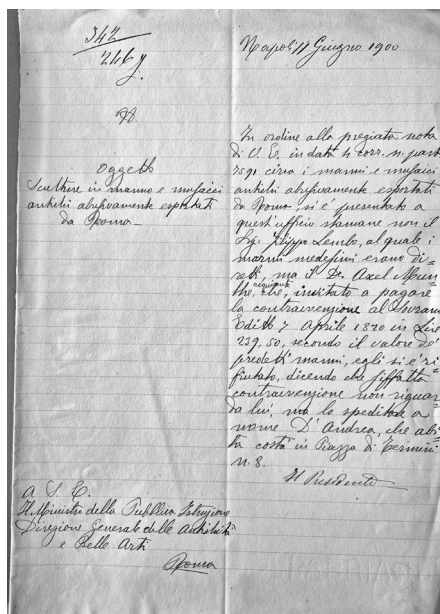
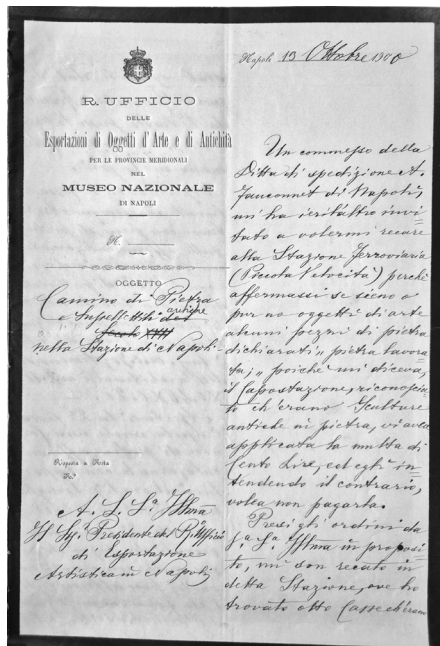
51. See DI FRANCO 2018a, pp. 100-107.

52. A telling case of the worldwide channels of acquisition is illustrated by a petition that John Clay MacKowen submitted *ante* April 27th, 1886 to the *Prefettura della Provincia di Napoli*, so that «aspettando da Gibilterra due casse contenenti diversi oggetti antichi fra i quali alcune armi [...] gliene venga permessa l’introduzione trattandosi di oggetti di antichità per collezione e non di armi per uso» (Capri B CCIC, *Fondo John Clay MacKowen*, 6458 partially published in LA PAGLIA 2018a, p. 57).

53. On Filippo Lembo see, lastly, IASIELLO 2017, p. 335, note 42 e *passim*.

54. On Giulio de Petra see, lastly, IASIELLO 2017, pp. 393-395 e *passim*.

55. Naples ASMANN, X B7, 2 (partially published in IASIELLO 2017, pp. 335-338, 340).

Fig. 6. Report of Giulio de Petra to Carlo Fiorilli, Naples, June 11th, 1900 (Naples ASMANN, X B7, 2).Fig. 7. Report of Antonio Palumbo to Giulio de Petra, Naples, October 13th, 1900 (Naples ASMANN, X B7, 3).

of Viterbo) to Naples for Charles Caryl Coleman. This consignment was likewise detained at the Neapolitan train station owing to the unpaid export duty. Upon ascertaining the infraction in compliance with the forenamed *Editto Pacca*, Antonio Palumbo⁵⁶, Supervisor of the *Real Ufficio delle Esportazioni di Oggetti d’Arte e di Antichità per le Provincie Meridionali nel Museo Nazionale di Napoli*, issued a pointed remark (fig. 7):

continui contrabbandi di oggetti d’arte e di antichità, che pare stanno assumendo una linea molto ascendente nell’Esportazione clandestina, massime per Capri, ove la Colonia straniera è sempre più numerosa⁵⁷.

It is no coincidence, then, that in 1904 a dedicated export office was eventually established on the island of Capri⁵⁸. This place was by no means an ‘enclave’ between the 19th and 20th centuries, as the fairly homogeneous collecting habits of its “*colonia straniera*” largely mirrored those observable on the Italian mainland. Without even looking too far afield, striking parallels can be drawn with foreigners who resided on the opposite shore of the Sorrentine Peninsula⁵⁹; an exponent *par excellence* is, undoubtedly, the American (with English citizenship) politician and entrepreneur William Waldorf Astor⁶⁰, who – having earlier stayed in Rome for a while as well – set up a multi-faceted collection at his estate *Villa Sirena* in Sorrento, showcasing a flair for ornamental design⁶¹.

For all these reasons, what Werner Muensterberger⁶² affirmed about collecting would seem to be supported, namely that «Taste, choice, style are inevitably affected, albeit often unconsciously, by the Zeitgeist, the spirit and the sociocultural climate of an era»⁶³.

Between the past and present: a challenging cultural legacy

Although the collections formed at that time by the international collectors’ community of Capri may be deemed ‘private museums’⁶⁴, a ‘public dimension’ may nevertheless be perceived, albeit to varying levels. This aspect would appear to be connoted, first and foremost, by artefacts embedded in exterior walls or otherwise visible from outside the owners’ houses, functioning as symbolic calling cards that offered a preview of what could be seen inside (fig. 8)⁶⁵.

56. On Antonio Palumbo see, lastly, IASIELLO 2017, pp. 423-429 e *passim*.

57. Naples ASMANN, X B7, 3 (partially published in IASIELLO 2017, pp. 349-351).

58. DE ANGELIS BERTOLOTTI 2001, p. 28 with reference to such an inception; in addition, IASIELLO 2017, p. 351, DI FRANCO 2018a, p. 108, and DI FRANCO - DI MARTINO 2018b, p. XIV.

59. Cfr. LONGOBARDO 2025b, p. 58.

60. On William Waldorf Astor see, lastly, LONGOBARDO 2025a.

61. Cfr. LONGOBARDO 2025a.

62. On Werner Muensterberger see, lastly, ZEITZ 2013.

63. MUENSTERBERGER 1994, p. 8.

64. Vd. *supra*.

65. See D’ANNA 2018, pp. 154-156, LA PAGLIA 2018a, pp. 56, 63, LA PAGLIA 2018b, p. 312.

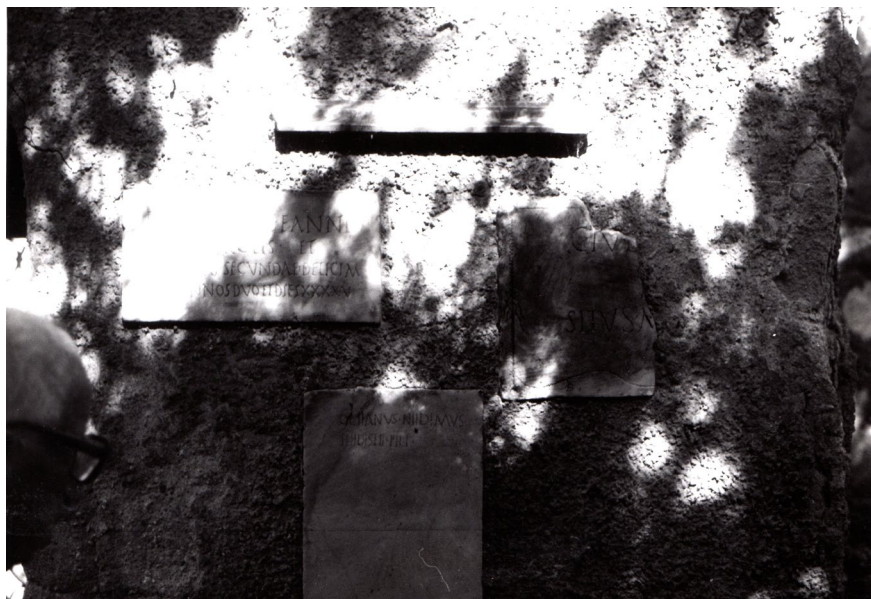


Fig. 8. [Anonymous], [*Inscriptions embedded in the exterior walls at Villa Due Pini*], photograph, 20th century (Capri B CCIC, *Fondo Teodoro Pagano*, no inv.).

Furthermore, the welcome inscription in ancient Greek put by John Clay MacKowen on the lintel of *Casa Rossa*'s entrance, ΧΑΙΡΕ Ω ΠΟΛΙΤΑ ΑΠΡΑΓΟΠΟΛΕΩΣ⁶⁶ – “Greetings, O citizen of the land of idleness” –, might serve as a subtle clue regarding the opportunity for access that the American proprietor perhaps afforded to passers-by, if nothing else to enjoy the pieces displayed in the courtyard.

A similar, though more implicit, intention to enable visitors to view one's own collection could be inferred from the testimony of the Italian prelate Antonio Canale, who wrote apropos Haan Antal:

che si comprò il Castello di palazzo a mare, tra gli esterni per innalzarvi un palazzo, rinvenne anche moltissimi marmi, ed altri oggetti, che espose in mostra nel muro di una stanza a pian terreno della sua villa [*Villa Il Fortino*]⁶⁷.

Conversely, an unmistakable openness to guests is explicitly attested by Charles Augustus de Kay with respect to Charles Caryl Coleman, since:

The Villa Narcissus [...] has been sufficiently attractive these ten years past to allure from Rome the pupils of the American School of Archaeology, who have visited it as a noteworthy example of what one man can do in the way of arranging a small villa, given time and the requisite taste⁶⁸.

66. For a succinct reflection relative to this modern epigraph consult LA PAGLIA 2018a, p. 56, note 22.

67. CANALE 1887, p. 297.

68. DE KAY 1902, pp. 85-91.

Axel Martin Fredrik Munthe took this a step further. In 1937, he formalised the official admission of the general public to his *Villa San Michele*; however, less than a year after launching this social initiative, he declared, in an epistle to the Prefectural Commissioner Renato de Zerbi, that serious preservation issues had to be confronted, including thefts, which ultimately compromised the integrity of the premises:

Quando ho proposto alle autorità di Capri di applicare a scopo di beneficenza una tassa d’ingresso di cinque lire per visitare San. Michele non potevo prevedere i gravi disturbi e danni che ha causato a me e alla mia proprietà questa vera invasione nella mia casa di più di 12000 visitatori durante questi ultimi dieci mesi. La mia casa è diventata inabitabile per me e per i miei amici, che usavo invitare ogni tanto come miei ospiti graditi a San Michele. Molti frammenti antichi di marmo o terracotta, sparsi nel giardino o nelle stanze, sono spariti. Vari rari libri e stampe sono stati sottratti. Il bel pavimento di mosaico con disegni pompeiani nel salotto grande è stato completamente rovinato e ha dovuto essere sostituito con un pavimento di mattoni. Tappeti orientali sono stati messi in pezzi, vari mobili antichi malmenati. Tutti i fiori e varie piante nel giardino sono stati strappati⁶⁹.

Slightly more than a decade later, precisely in 1948, the Scandinavian *amateur* stipulated by testamentary provision that the immovable and movable properties on Capri be bequeathed to the state of Sweden, his motherland. Thus, notwithstanding the previous – and somewhat traumatic – museographic experience, following the death of Axel Martin Fredrik Munthe, the Swedish government founded the *Stiftelsen San Michele*, which has been responsible for the subsequent site’s musealisation starting from 1950.

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to provide a synopsis of the fates of the collections held by the other foreign ‘colonists’ upon their passing, in order to spotlight the current heritage on the island resulting from this distinctive collecting phenomenon. Yet the task is complicated by the diverse and often fragmented trajectories that each individual case has undergone over time.

An echo of the Benner collection can be traced in the Pagano collection – more accurately referred to as the Benner-Pagano collection –, which remains in Capri today thanks to the donation executed by Teodoro Costanzo Luigi Pagano⁷⁰, Jean Benner’s nephew-in-law (and great-grandson of the aforementioned Giuseppe Pagano), in favour of the *Museo Ignazio Cerio* at the *Centro Caprense Ignazio Cerio*, where it arrived between 1980 and 1985⁷¹.

By contrast, the Haan collection migrated, thereby transforming, into the Bismarck collection, whose name derives from the American socialite Mona Bismarck (née Edmona Sims Strader)⁷², who purchased *Villa Il Fortino* together with its possessions in 1937. Following her decease in 1983, several objects were sold or even

69. Letter from Axel Martin Fredrik Munthe to Renato de Zerbi, [Anacapri], November, 1937 (Capri AC, b. 55 partially published in DE ANGELIS BERTOLOTTI 2001, pp. 329-330).

70. On Teodoro Costanzo Luigi Pagano see, lastly, D’ANNA 2018, *passim*.

71. See D’ANNA 2018, pp. 151-154.

72. On Mona Bismarck (née Edmona Sims Strader) see, lastly, PISATURO 2022.



Fig. 9. [Anonymous], *Capri - Villa Bismark. Collezione archeologica*, photograph, 1988 (Naples A SABAP NA, *Ufficio Vincoli*, b. 259).

smuggled out; the surviving antiquities were finally seized by the then *Soprintendenza Archeologica di Napoli e Caserta* (fig. 9), with the majority transferred to the archaeological storerooms at the *Certosa di San Giacomo*, while a minority remained – and still remains – at the flamboyant dwelling, which continues to function as a private complex⁷³.

Villa Narcissus retains an identical status, but the Coleman collection has since been dismembered; indeed, the originator's heirs alienated the items through sales or gifts, often rendering them untraceable, except for some pieces scattered across various institutions in the United States of America⁷⁴.

A comparable overseas destination awaited a selection of the MacKowen collection, during the owner's lifetime. After his death, many additional materials – mostly and regrettably lost – left *Casa Rossa*; fortunately, many others – chiefly ancient artefacts – were *in loco* when in 1990 the then *Soprintendenza per i Beni Ambientali e Architettonici di Napoli e Provincia* acquired the edifice, which was eventually converted into a museum (fig. 10)⁷⁵.

73. See DI FRANCO 2018b, pp. 142-143, 145-146, 148, 150.

74. See DI FRANCO 2018a, p. 119.

75. See LA PAGLIA 2018a, pp. 59-63, 68-71.



Fig. 10. Mariano De Angelis, *Casa Rossa*, photograph, 2018
(Divisare, *Bell'Italia*, Project 396212).

Formulating the concluding thoughts, the legacy of the collecting practices that unfolded on Capri throughout the 19th and 20th centuries within the so-called “*colonia straniera*” has been transmitted in a rather distorted version. The ‘containers’ – the residences – endure in excellent condition; the ‘contents’ – the collections – persist in diminished condition. Today, the Campanian island hosts museum expressions related to the theme explored, albeit they are fundamentally disconnected from one another. Each narrates, more or less effectively, just a single chapter of an interwoven story. However, this composite chronicle deserves to be presented in a holistic manner, by means of a cohesive museographic approach that embraces its full scope and significance. Only by doing so can the true cultural and historical value of Capri’s international collectors’ community at that epoch be fully appreciated and successfully communicated.

ARCHIVES' ABBREVIATIONS

Capri AC = Capri, *Archivio Comunale*.

Capri B CCIC = Capri, *Biblioteca del Centro Caprese Ignazio Cerio*.

Naples A SABAP NA = Naples, *Archivio della Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio per il Comune di Napoli*.

Naples ASMANN = Naples, *Archivio Storico del Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli*.

Paris B-AP = Paris, *Beaux-Arts de Paris*.

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