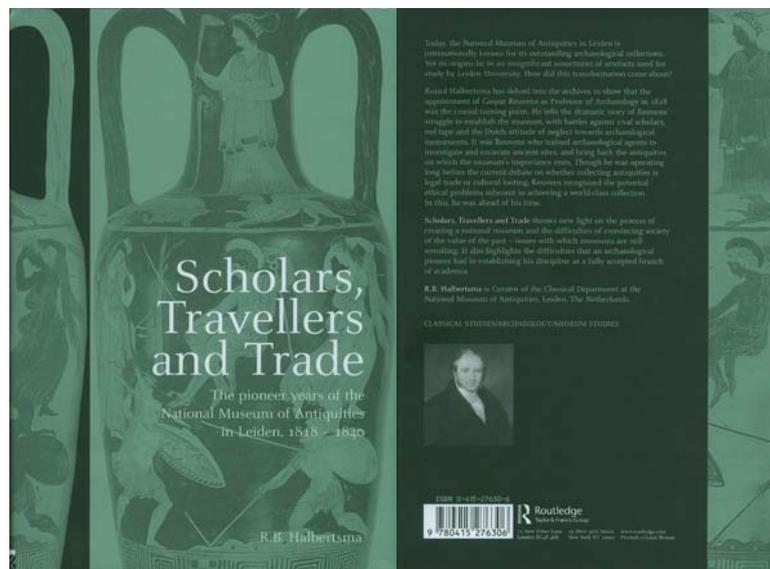


Halbertsma, R.B. 2003. Scholars, travellers and trade. The pioneer years of the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, 1818-1840. – London, Routledge

Book review by A.J. Veldmeijer



The National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden is one of The Netherlands' most famous museums and its archaeological collections are known all over the world. Many, if not all, important archaeological museums, have their origin in the collecting of curiosities by wealthy people. In the case of the Leiden museum, this was slightly different as it started as the insignificant assortment of artefacts used for study by the Leiden University. On the other hand, money which was needed to expand the collection in order to compete with countries like England, France, Germany and Italy as well as much of the scientific research came from the Ministry of Education and often by the benevolence of the Dutch king Willem I (1772-1843) himself. It was world's first professor in archaeology, Casper Reuven, who was the crucial turning point in the transformation of this insignificant assortment into a collection of high standard. And Reuven not only played an important role in collecting, but also in the archaeological science of and in The Netherlands. It was Reuven who "trained archaeological agents to investigate and excavate ancient sites" and who fought against "the Dutch attitude of neglect towards archaeological monuments" (both citations from cover).

The book is divided in 10 chapters, relating various topics and forms a coherent story on these early formative years. The introduction gives in short background information on the political developments, including the 'Ten-days-war' resulting in Belgium's independence, the appointment of Reuven by royal decree (ruling by royal decree was king Willem's favourite way of ruling), the financing of collecting artefacts and the sources.

The first chapter deals with the various early collections such as the Reijnst collection and the Smetius collection of which the majority of items were sold, after the death of their owners, outside The Netherlands. The subsequent chapter introduces Reuven, son of a jurist with a high position in society and his numerous conflicts (chapter four) on collecting, organisation and scholarly views. The next chapters relates the collecting and expeditions on behalf of the museum by people as Rottiers and Humbert. Important collections were obtained, such as the Egyptian collection D'Anastasy. Chapter eight focuses on Reuven's archaeological work in The Netherlands, through which it becomes evident how important Reuven has been for the archaeological science. A good example are the elaborate field drawings. For instance, the excavations at Arentsburg during 1827-1830 included two young draftsmen, T. Hooiberg and W. Gordon, who were ordered by Reuven to make (p. 124) "three types of field drawings: drawings of the horizontal plane, vertical sections and three-dimensional perspective elevations." in this being the first to realise the importance of good registration and recording. Chapter nine relates the housing of the collection of antiquities and the final chapter focuses on Reuven's last years. He had suffered bad health especially the last two years of his life. His death in 1835, at the age of only 42 (p. 141) "was to transform the future of the National Museum of Antiquities." The book is completed with four appendices ('Life of C.J.C. Reuven', 'The *discorso preliminare* of Raffaele Gargiulo: classifying Greek vases', 'Earliest museum publications, 1818-40' and 'Le voyageur: a wanderer's song') and ends with the notes, bibliography and finally an index.

The book is a well-written, thoroughly researched story of the difficult early years of this museum and its great power behind it, Casper Reuven. It is well-arranged, with a nice layout and good quality pictures. This

great book is a must for everyone interested in science in general, museology, archaeology and history and is highly recommended. It was a joy to read!

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