

“For we know in part” (1 Kor 13:9): Johannes Boehlau’s assemblage of ceramic fragments as part of the collection of Greek and Roman antiquities at the Georg August University Göttingen

1. Synopsis

The beginnings of the collection of Greek and Roman antiquities at the university of Göttingen date back to the 18th century. This collection never evolved into a veritable university museum such as in Bonn or Würzburg (Graepler 2001). Instead it always functioned as an instrument of scholarly teaching and research. To this collection in Göttingen, the classical archaeologist and former director of the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, Johannes Boehlau (1861–1941), bequeathed his scientific estate as well as his collection of more than 1.000 fragments of ancient Greek pottery upon his death in 1941.

In the context of the collection of Greek and Roman originals at the Georg August University Göttingen the humble potsherds brought together by Boehlau form a fascinating body of objects from a museological perspective: Around the turn of 20th century, when Boehlau assembled these pieces, fragments were generally not considered valuable enough for museum or academic collection. Instead, the focus of collecting lay on complete objects; sculptures, coins, terracotta figurines and vases. In a way, this collection reflects Boehlaus scholarly innovativeness and a synoptic analysis of this body of objects together with his written estate will show how advanced archaeological knowledge was gained and preserved before World War II. Only through the conservation of this unique context of objects within the framework of the academic collections at the University of Göttingen, it is possible to reconstruct this epistemic archive and its impact on later archaeological research. Thusly emphasizing the leading role within the »Klassische Altertumswissenschaften« that Göttingen held before World War II.

Our proposal is for a twofold approach, that reflect the scholarly interests and competences of the applicants: N. Panteleon will investigate the relevance of the Boehlau collection in regard to the current state of affairs in research of East Aegean pottery, while I. Panteleon will analyze the relations between the textual and material contents of Boehlau’s estate. In a final step, the applicants will synthesize their results and elaborate how and to which extent the Boehlau collection impacted on academic research and teaching at the Institute of Archaeology at the Georg August University Göttingen and beyond.

2. Objectives and Approaches

2.1. I. Panteleon

Johannes Boehlau was one of the most innovative excavators of his time in the field of classical archaeology and transferred more advanced knowledge about excavating techniques from prehistory into this discipline (Panteleon 2011b). With the excavation of a necropolis on the island of Samos in 1894, he was the first to fully realize the potential of the systematic excavation of ancient graves to solve problems of chronology and localization of greek ceramics (Boehlau 1898). With his excavations on the island of Lesbos (1907, unpublished) and in Larisa (1902, 1931–1934) Boehlau went even further and initiated explicitly for the first time the excavation of urban structures of the archaic period (Naumann 1942), which had proved very difficult to properly document during comparable excavations at his time or before. Moreover the excavation in Larisa was – as a german/swedish cooperation – from the beginning an international endeavor. After the first campaign in 1902, the excavators acknowledged their inability to cope with the stratigraphic situation found on site and continued the excavation only nearly thirty years later, after more sophisticated methods of scientific digging had been established.

In regards to Boehlaus innovativeness in field archaeology, the interconnections between his textual estate and his collection of ceramic fragments will be analyzed to show how archaeological knowledge was gained and preserved in material form. The research on the written estate, which consists of more than 40 folders with correspondences etc. and a like number of (field-)notebooks, will focus on evidences relevant for the process of collecting – its criteria and reflections upon – as well as on scholarly exchange of knowledge through correspondence. With these results, the ‘stratigraphy’ or anatomy of Boehlaus collection of ceramic fragments will be assessed. Since, although the material is said to derive from Boehlaus excavations on Lesbos and in Larisa, there are indications in his letters from a reconnaissance journey through the east Greek islands and the coastal area of Asia Minor in 1894, that he had already collected samples of ceramics on several other sites (Boehlau 1996). In the same vein it will be worthwhile, to link sub-assemblages of sherds in the Larisa material to the two stages of this excavation (1902 and 1931–1934), because they bridge the important transition from traditional ways of excavating to techniques, that resemble very well today’s understanding of scientific excavating.

2.2 N. Panteleon

Sherds of pottery are the staple of modern archaeology; as 'type fossils' they provide important data about chronology, localization as well as social and religious customs. The Johannes Boehlau collection consists of more than 1.000 pieces of fragments of mostly East Aegean pottery, of which around the half even bears no kind of painted decoration ('gray ware').

During the fellowship, the full spectrum of sherds will be analyzed and compared especially with the current state of research of East Aegean pottery. The attribution of certain types of East Aegean pottery is an ongoing question of research and a place of scholarly discourse (For a history of this discourse, cf. Kerschner 2002.). As a unique context of relevant archaeological material, the Boehlau collection contributes substantially to this field of research (Graepler 2001).

While the archeologists at the end of the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century have been more interested in completely preserved vases and other objects, those smaller pieces were rarely analyzed. To collect fragments of pottery during excavations was not common at Boehlau's time: Often, the sherds were left behind on site and refilled into the trenches. In Miletos e. g. only 150 fragments of kraters have been preserved during the excavations before 1970 (Panteleon 2011a). Today we know, that these few samples already gave us a nearly complete overview about the vase shapes and decorations found in this city. But in those days it was not possible to properly identify all local productions of ceramics in the East Aegean region: Sometimes obvious characteristics did not allow to identify production centers. Today archeometrical analysis helps in those cases, as they compare the chemical composition of the samples to propose an origin. So the Boehlau collection is a rare and important context, and the continuous requests to the material show how up-to-date this topic is (see publication list).

Therefore the Boehlau collection gives us the chance to see which criteria have been used to decide which pieces ought to be preserved at his time. Most of the fragments that survive in the Boehlau collection seem to have been found during Boehlau's excavations on Lesbos and in Larisa. It is assumable that all kind of shapes and decoration styles should exist in this collection. Especially, because of Boehlaus highly innovative archeological thinking.

2.3 Joint Work

This case study becomes possible because of the institutional continuity provided by preserving Johannes Boehlaus collection within the academic collections at the university of Göttingen. Indeed, upon his retirement from his museum position in Kassel in 1931, Boehlau moved to Göttingen because he found more suitable conditions for his ongoing work near the university (libraries etc.). From this new workplace, he directed the new campaigns in Larisa.

The question is why and how this pottery is connected with the collection of originals in Göttingen. Why did the collection stay in Göttingen after Boehlaus death? His longstanding affiliation with the museum in Kassel would have made it only logical that he would have willed it to this museum. Did he intent his collection to stay in a major centre of scholarship, so that it could be easier utilized in later research and teaching? There is a good chance to solve this by analyzing how his collection relates to the entire collection of antiquities in Göttingen and how it was utilized afterwards. We know that Boehlau sought actively the participation of young scholars in his researches and perhaps this was the reason. Maybe he intended that, besides research, it became possible for the students to familiarize themselves with a kind of findings, that is always found during excavations. The university calendars and his correspondence should show if there is a continuous educational use of it.

This proposed project takes place among ongoing work in both topics covered – the history of academic collections and current archaeological research – and will provide incentives in both directions by facilitating access to the material and by emphasizing the importance of and variety in academic collections. Furthermore, the systematic appraisal of this part of the collection of Greek and Roman originals in Göttingen lays the foundation for synchronic and diachronic comparisons of like early collections of archaeological objects, which exist – maybe neglected – in other academic and private collections.

3. Timeframe

The proposed project should be pursued in such a way, that the applicants each stay and work for approx. two months in Göttingen with an overlapping timespan of one month. The work would be best carried out in the months October – December 2013.

4 Selected Literature

For further reading on the collection of antique originals in Göttingen and on the Boehlau material, cf. the comprehensive list on the webpage of the Archaeological Institute: <<http://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/138143.html>>

- Boehlau 1898 J. Boehlau, Aus ionischen und italischen Nekropolen. Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der nachmykenischen griechischen Kunst (Leipzig 1898).
- Boehlau 1996 J. Boehlau, Ein Reisebericht in Briefen und Photographien von Johannes Boehlau an Edward Habich, in: Staatliche Museen Kassel (Hrsg.), Samos – die Kasseler Grabung in der Nekropole der archaischen Stadt von Johannes Boehlau und Edward Habich (Kassel 1996) 160–221.
- Graepler 2001 D. Graepler, Die Originalsammlung des Archäologischen Instituts, in: D. Hoffmann – K. Maack-Rheinländer (Hrsg.), „Ganz für das Studium angelegt“. Die Museen, Sammlungen und Gärten der Universität Göttingen (Göttingen 2001) 55-63 [aktualisierte Fassung: Die Sammlung antiker Originale im Archäologischen Institut der Universität Göttingen. <<http://wwwuser.gwdg.de/~archaeo/ORIGSLG2.pdf>> (8.8.2013)].
- Kerschner 2002 M. Akurgal – M. Kerschner – H. Mommsen – W.-D. Niemeier, Töpferzentren der Ostägäis. Archäometrische Untersuchungen zur mykenischen, geometrischen und archaischen Keramik aus Fundorten in Westkleinasien, ÖJh Erg. 3 (Wien 2002) 28–36.
- Naumann 1942 R. Naumann, Gnomon 18/6, 1942, 311–319 [Rez. zu J. Boehlau – K. Schefold (Hrsg.), Die Bauten, Larisa am Hermos. Die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen 1902 – 1934 1 (Berlin 1940)].
- Panteleon 2011a N. Panteleon, Die Kratere der archaischen Zeit aus Milet (unpubl. Dissertation Ruhr-Universität Bochum 2011).
- Panteleon 2011b I. A. Panteleon, Eine Archäologie der Direktoren. Die Erforschung Milets im Namen der Berliner Museen in den Jahren 1899–1914 und ihr historischer Kontext (unpubl. Dissertation Ruhr-Universität Bochum 2011).
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