

History of the Van Buren Antiquities

The antiquities collection in the Department of Classical Languages and Literatures at Smith College consists of approximately 165 artifacts -- vases, cups, marbles, terracotta votive figurines, bronze ware, glass ware, inscriptions, household utensils, etc. -- dating from early Greek to Late Roman times. The core of the collection was originally the personal study collection of Albert William Van Buren (1878-1968), whose career as Professor of Archaeology and Curator of the Archaeological Study Collection at the American Academy in Rome spanned over five decades of the twentieth century. He introduced generations of American students to the monuments of Rome, Latium and Etruria, and he played a key role in the acquisition and care of the Academy's rich and variegated archaeological collection, which is today studied by Academy Fellows in the 'Norton-Van Buren Seminar Room'. His personal study collection, now at Smith College, was assembled in his earliest years in Rome (1902-06), in the expectation that it would serve him well in a teaching career at home in America. Fate, however, took him on a different path and the collection was eventually sold to a member of the Smith College Latin Department in 1925.

A. W. Van Buren was born the son of an Episcopal clergyman in Milford, Connecticut in 1878. He graduated from Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts in 1896, ranked the top Classics student in his year, and from Yale University in 1900, having compiled an excellent undergraduate record in Classics. After two years of graduate work at Yale he embarked for Rome in autumn 1902 as a Fellow of the American School of Classical Studies in Rome, which would later merge with the American Academy and move to the Academy's current residence on the Janiculum hill in 1914.

In his four years as a Fellow at the School, between the ages of 24 and 28, Van Buren assembled a study collection of some 81 objects plus hundreds of pot sherds. His personal inventory of the collection, a copy of which survives at Smith, occasionally mentions the place and date of purchase, and in a few instances the name of the dealer and the object's provenance. Most objects were acquired from dealers in and around Rome, like three fine Late Etruscan votive terracottas (25.86, 87, 88), bought by Van Buren at Isola Farnese, in the district of ancient Veii immediately to the north of Rome, soon after his arrival in autumn 1902. The four marble inscriptions in the collection were purchased from a Roman dealer in June 1905 and were said to be "probably from the neighborhood of the new 'Corso di Porta Pinciana.'" The year 1904 proved particularly rich in acquisitions. In the spring of that year, the American School, then under the direction of Richard Norton, went on a six-week cruise in the Eastern Mediterranean aboard the private yacht of Norton's good friend and School benefactor, Allison Armour. Norton honored the young Van Buren, a Fellow at the School, and another student, Charles Curtis, with participation in a wonderful voyage that would take them to ports on Crete, Santorini, the southwest coast of Turkey, Rhodes, Cyprus, Cyrene, and Sicily. The cruise proved to be a major buying trip for the American School, and even the twenty-six year old Van Buren was caught up in the buying spirit, though his means were of course modest. In Rhodes Town, he bought seven pieces of black- and red-figure Attic ware, five of them from 'Mr. Biliotti', who stated that the pieces came from Kameiros on the island's west coast. This Biliotti was either Sir Alfred Biliotti, who had excavated at Kameiros many years before and who had just retired in 1903 after a long career as a Consul General of Great Britain, or, perhaps, a younger

relation. At Larnaka and Nikosia on Cyprus, Van Buren purchased nine pieces of Cypriote pottery of differing shapes and dates. He also purchased a few objects for donation to the School's collection.

In 1906 Van Buren returned to Yale with his study collection and resumed his graduate work, but he was soon invited to return to the American School as Librarian and Lecturer in Archaeology. He accepted this post with dual responsibilities, unaware that his move back to Rome in 1908 would be permanent and that he never would return to an academic career in America. Promoted to Associate Professor (1911) and Professor of Archaeology (1926), Van Buren would continue to serve as Librarian, first of the American School and then of the American Academy until 1926, when he took over the duties of Curator of the Academy's archaeological collections, a post he held until his retirement soon after the end of World War II. In his long career at the Academy, he purchased many antiquities and coins for the Academy and supervised the publication of the Academy's considerable antiquities collections. His own list of publications would eventually run to well over one hundred items.

Before returning to Rome in the autumn of 1908, Van Buren deposited his study collection in Phelps Hall at Yale, where it would remain until 1925, when he sold it to Professor F. Warren Wright of the Smith Latin Department. Wright was in Rome that summer and interested in acquiring antiquities for a study collection at Smith. He and Van Buren met, presumably at the Academy, and negotiated the purchase of the collection left on deposit at Yale years before. When Wright had returned to America and seen the collection for the first time, he wrote warmly to Van Buren that it far exceeded his expectation. The Van Buren antiquities (some 81 objects) became the core of the Smith Classics archaeological study collection, which now includes an additional 50 artifacts as well as a collection of 180 Greek and Roman coins. How and when these other antiquities and coins came to the department remains mysterious. As early as 1907, the Classics faculty (then threefold, with separate departments of Greek, Latin and Archaeology) were offering archaeology courses and it is reasonable to suppose that department members had begun to purchase objects for teaching purposes. The coin collection had clearly been acquired by the 1910s, when it was catalogued by Professor Emily Shields, but its origin remains unclear.

From 1925 until 1961, these collections were housed in Hatfield Hall in a room known as the 'Archaeology Museum', and, in later years, the 'Classical Museum'. When Neilson Library was expanded and renovated in 1961, several academic departments were given a Study, a room where students, especially honors candidates, might find a core collection of books and periodicals useful to them. The Classics Study was to be found in a handsome room next to the Lyon Reading Room. Into it were moved the antiquities, a core collection of classical texts and reference works, student honor theses, a large case of 4" by 4" lantern slides, and even a modest number of Chinese vases for which the College appeared to have no other display space. On top of the display cases was a collection of classical busts, including a fine marble Augustus. When the next renovation of the Library occurred in the late 1970s, the departmental studies were discontinued, with the sole exception of the Classics Study, which was dismantled and reassembled in an almost perfect replica in its current spot, largely because its journals would be located adjacent to the current Periodical Room, but also because Professor Charles Henderson, then Chair of the Department (and, as it happened, Chair of the Library Building Committee) argued that

some part of the newly refurbished library should retain the look and atmosphere of the old one. As the library renovations drew to a close in 1979, the new Classics Study was named in honor of a much beloved classicist, Julia Harwood Caverno, who held two degrees from Smith (A.B. 1887, A.M. 1890) and had taught Greek at the College from 1893 until 1931. The Van Buren Antiquities are still housed in the Classics Study (Caverno Room), which was thoroughly refurbished in 1998, when new museum-quality display cabinets were installed and plaster reliefs from the National Archaeological Museum in Athens were put on display.

Among the professors who worked on the antiquities collection over the years, mention should be made of Sidney Deane, who held the official title of Curator of the Classical Museum from 1926 to 1943, Charles Henderson, who, with the help of students in the Classics Senior Seminar, compiled a departmental catalogue between 1981 and 1987, and Scott Bradbury, the current Keeper of Antiquities and person responsible for the online publication of the collection.

The department is particularly grateful to Katherine Geffcken, Professor Emerita Greek and Latin at Wellesley College, for making available her research into Van Buren's life and work (now published in Bonfante, Larissa, Helen Nagy, and Jacquelyn Collins-Clinton, eds. *The Collection of Antiquities of the American Academy in Rome*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2015. *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* Supplementary volume XI). Without her work on the Van Buren papers at the American Academy, a detailed narrative of the acquisition and travels of Van Buren's personal study collection would not have been possible.

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