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Introduction: Connoisseurship in the Networked Eighteenth Century

A gathering of three scholars, each accompanied by attributes of the approaches to knowledge they represent, is prominently depicted in Shiba Kōkan's (1747–1818) late Edo period scroll (fig. 1). At left, a Chinese literatus sits on a stool covered with an animal skin; a closed handscroll and *ruyi* scepter sit on the table before him. At right, a European man, likely Dutch, wearing a wig and a robe and seated on an upholstered, backed chair, holds a treatise on anatomy opened to a print of a human skeleton. Between them, a Japanese samurai, holding a fan and with a snake, or snake-like bracelet, encircling his wrist, contemplates the medicinal plants in the vase in front of him. Above them, teams of Chinese, European, and Japanese firefighters use their respective technologies to douse the flames consuming a large temple.

The scroll is complex, even polemical, in its comparison of different models of learning.[1] For our purposes, however, the painting bears witness to the growing exchange of knowledge between Asian polities and between Asia and Europe in the eighteenth century. Shiba Kōkan, a Japanese painter, etcher, and scholar of *Rangaku* (Dutch studies), was an early exponent of Western-style painting in Japan. His oeuvre exemplifies the Eurasian flows of cultural influence and the circulation of artworks facilitated by eighteenth-century networks of scholars, travelers, traders, East India Company operatives, and collectors. Though medicine (an empirical, diagnostic process not unlike art connoisseurship[2]) is the subject of the meeting around the table on Shiba Kōkan's scroll, the artist's pictorial placement of China, Japan, and Europe on equal terms thematizes the multiplying transformative and destabilizing encounters with other peoples and unfamiliar forms of knowledge and art in an increasingly connected century. In this respect, the scroll illustrates the ambitions of our volume. In contrast to local or national approaches to art connoisseurship, we focus on the transnational: on the networks through which artworks moved beyond their places of production and the variable impacts of these artworks on connoisseurial practices in their new contexts of reception.

1 Our discussion of the painting is indebted to Federico Marcon, "The 'Book' as Fieldwork: 'Textual Institutions' and Nature Knowledge in Early Modern Japan," *BJHS Themes* 5 (2020): pp. 131–48, here, pp. 131–34, and Giovanni Tarantino, "Identities on Fire: East Meets West on the Palette of Shiba Kōkan (1738–1818)," *Occasion* 13 (2022), https://arcade.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/Occasion-v13-Tarantino.pdf. On *Rangaku* and for further discussions of Shiba Kōkan's works, see Timon Screech, *The Lens within the Heart: The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002). On *Rangaku*, see also Kit Brooks's contribution to this volume.

2 On the links between these different areas of expertise, see Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm," *Theory and Society* 7, no. 3 (May 1979): pp. 273–88.

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Fig. 1: Shiba Kōkan, *A Meeting of Japan, China, and the West*, late eighteenth–early nineteenth century, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 101.6 × 49.53 cm (image), Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, 2013.29.158

The contributors to this book investigate the intricate cultural, social, and economic transactions through which connoisseurial knowledge of art was generated in Asia and in Europe during the long eighteenth century. As is well-known, this period was the age *par excellence* of the connoisseur, the disciplined interpreter and assessor of artworks whose claim to authority, like that of the natural philosopher, was founded on his (more rarely her) sustained visual analysis of physical things. An era of accelerating trade and imperial conquest, the eighteenth century was also a period of an expanding global consciousness. The concept that brings these two themes together—the emergence of the connoisseur and an increasing engagement with artworks from afar—is the network: the structures that made connoisseurial exchange within and between continents possible, including the construction and implementation of communication channels, the social dynamics of connoisseurial practices, and the constellation of commercial and political institutions that facilitated their development.

Little, however, has been written about the connoisseurial networks of this period, and a broader reflection on the encounters they enabled with artistic practices from different regions of the globe has yet to appear. Historians of science have demonstrated that almost every advance in botanical knowledge made in the eighteenth century was embedded in a network of international information and specimen exchange.[3] Yet, studies of eighteenth-century connoisseurship in Europe have generally stayed local, focusing, for instance, on an individual and his or her web of social relations.[4] Others have tended to examine the connoisseurship of Western European or Chinese art, for instance, to the exclusion of works from unfamiliar artistic traditions to which eighteenth-century art experts, collectors, and colonial administrators were increasingly exposed. Building upon recent scholarship on the impacts of cultural contact on artmaking and on comparative considerations of antiquarianism, this volume takes a more expansive view of connoisseurship, one that integrates the overlapping networks of trade and conquest that increasingly linked parts of Europe to each other and Europe

3 See, among others, Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Regina Dauser, Stefan Hächler, Michael Kempe, Franz Mauelshagen, and Martin Stuber, eds., *Wissen im Netz. Botanik und Pflanzentransfer in europäischen Korrespondenznetzen des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008). The interest of historians of science in network studies developed during the 1990s largely in response to Bruno Latour's "Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands," *Knowledge and Society* 6 (1986): pp. 1–40. For an analysis of this shift, see Emma C. Spary, "Botanical Networks Revisited," in *Wissen im Netz,* pp. 47–64.

4 See, for example: Isabelle Tillerot, *Jean de Jullienne et les collectionneurs de son temps: un regard singulier sur le tableau* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2010); Kristel Smentek, *Mariette and the Science of the Connoisseur in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Farnham, VT: Ashgate, 2014); Valérie Kobi, *Dans l'œil du connoisseur. Pierre-Jean Mariette (1694–1774) et la construction des savoirs en histoire de l'art* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2017); Thomas Ketelsen and Martin Schuster, eds., *Carl Heinrich von Heineken in Dresden auf Schloss Altdöbern* (Dresden: Sandstein, 2018).

to Asia into an analysis of its practices and transregional synergies and dissonances.[5] Our contributors ask how social, institutional, and commercial networks of connoisseurship were built and evolved over time. What were the channels through which encounters with art from afar were made possible? What methods were used to categorize art from other parts of the globe? And how might a recognition of the conventionality of artmaking have shaped local definitions of art and artistic quality in Asia and in Europe?

Over the chapters of this book, our authors present in-depth investigations of the different processes through which eighteenth-century connoisseurs in China, France, Germany, India, Italy, and Japan generated knowledge about art, negotiating the unfamiliar conventions of art from elsewhere and posing questions about the specificities and the categorization of local artistic traditions. Our collective goal is not to posit universals about art connoisseurship and its effects in this formative period. Indeed, the Americas and Africa, critical geographies in the networked eighteenth century, are not represented in this volume although we hoped they might be. Instead, through our case studies of eighteenth-century Eurasian connoisseurial connections and dislocations, our ambition is to defamiliarize the familiar, to bring into view objects and practices that cross national boundaries and disciplinary specializations, and to be open to the alternate histories of art and its reception that they propose.

We came to our interests in the transnational dimensions of eighteenth-century connoisseurship because of our respective research on Pierre-Jean Mariette (1694–1774), a celebrated French collector and, for many scholars, the paradigmatic eighteenth-century European connoisseur, of the graphic arts. Our readers will encounter him again in Émilie Roffidal and Gabriel Batalla-Lagleyre's contributions to this volume. In her text, Roffidal demonstrates how closely connoisseurship was linked to trade—on a national and especially an international level—through her analysis of the activities of a Levantine network in Marseille, including the wealthy merchant

5 On artistic impacts, see, for example: Screech, *The Lens within the Heart*; Mary D. Sheriff, ed., *Cultural Contact and the Making of European Art since the Age of Exploration* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Nebahat Avcıoğlu, *Turquerie and the Politics of Representation, 1728–1876* (Farnham, VT: Ashgate, 2011); Natasha Eaton, *Mimesis Across Empires: Artworks and Networks in India, 1765–1860* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Ning Ding, eds., *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges between China and the West* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2015); Elizabeth A. Fraser, *Mediterranean Encounters: Artists Between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, 1774–1839* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017); Liza Oliver, *Art, Trade, and Imperialism in Early Modern French India* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019); Holly Shaffer, *Grafted Arts: Art Making and Taking in the Struggle for Western India, 1760–1910* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2022). On comparative antiquarianisms, see Peter N. Miller and François Louis, eds., *Antiquarian and Intellectual Life in Europe and China, 1500–1800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); Alain Schnapp, ed., *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2013); Charlotte Guichard and Stéphane Van Damme, eds., *Les Antiquités dépaysées: histoire globale de la culture antiquaire au siècle des Lumières* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022).

Pierre-Augustin Guys (1721–99). Following his return to his hometown after spending over ten years in Constantinople, Guys became a recognized art connoisseur and an active member of the local Académie des sciences et belles-lettres. As such, he leveraged his mastery of the logistics of Mediterranean trade to ship prized antiquities to collectors and connoisseurs in France and consolidate his own reputation in the process. A similarly close connection between trade and connoisseurship characterizes Mariette's career. In addition to his collecting and scholarly activities, he ran an internationally-renowned book and print shop in Paris and possessed an extensive business network that enabled his exchanges with connoisseurs across the continent.

Mariette's career and practice exemplify the consolidation, in eighteenth-century Europe, of the connoisseur as a social type and as an especially discerning judge whose authority was founded on extensive, first-hand, comparative analysis of works of art. As Pascal Griener has pointed out, comparative observation was a central tool of the connoisseur in the age of Enlightenment.[6] It was through the practice of comparative visual investigation that knowledge about art and of attributions was incrementally built. Julia Kloss-Weber's contribution foregrounds—through the example of two paintings by Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1738–1806) commissioned by the Marquis de Véri (1722–85), a Parisian collector primarily engaged by the modern French school—the importance of this approach, and the theoretical significance that the art of pendants, that is, the bringing together of paintings conceived from the beginning as a pair, could imply. Fragonard's canvases not only testify to the Marquis de Véri's status as a connoisseur but also make a strong claim for the painter himself as a connoisseur. In the pendants Fragonard proclaims himself an artist-connoisseur keenly attuned to the nuances of Dutch and Italian art who, in his painterly practice, simultaneously accentuates and sublimates these regional differences into a new, modern art at once transcultural and distinctively French.

Like Véri and Fragonard, Mariette was principally interested in European art; the vast majority of the over 9400 drawings and 1000s of prints he owned documented the styles and history of the Italian, French, Dutch, German, and Spanish schools. This focus on the graphic arts within European connoisseurial circles was widespread. As Gabriel Batalla-Lagleyre shows here, prints and drawings were not only the primary material foundation of the connoisseur's acquisition of knowledge about art, but many eighteenth-century collectors and connoisseurs practiced drawing and etching themselves as part of a process of understanding and appropriating the distinctive operations of an individual artist's hand. These techniques were tools to train their own hands and eyes as well as to faithfully record artistic particularities; Batalla-Lagleyre links this development to the use of drawing by such early modern astronomers as Galileo Galilei (1565–1642) and Johannes Hevelius (1611–87).

6 Pascal Griener, *La République de l'œil. L'Expérience de l'art au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2010).

Mariette had especially wide-ranging interests in the history and art of printmaking (interests no doubt motivated in part by his business), and his collection included works on paper from China.[7] The latter comprised only a fraction of his holdings, but their presence in his cabinet testifies to the increasing circulation of works from Asia and their very different aesthetics in eighteenth-century Europe. It also evidences the ambivalent attention directed towards these imports by European experts as well as the curiosity these works stimulated about the origins of the graphic medium. A compelling example of this curiosity is the case study addressed by Maria Gabriella Matarazzo. Her exploration of Vicente Victoria's (1650–1709) early eighteenth-century research on the history of printmaking reveals an awareness of China's possible priority in the invention of this technique. Victoria's speculations were prompted by his first-hand study of the *Tianzhu jiangsheng chuxiang jingjie* (*Illustrated Explanation of the Incarnation of the Lord of Heaven*) a Life of Christ illustrated with woodblock prints published in China in the early seventeenth century, which he claimed to have in his collection in Rome. As Matarazzo argues, Victoria was both admiring and conflicted about the graphic art from China he discussed. His mixed response was conditioned by negative European commentaries on Asian art but also shaped by his own direct encounter with prints from Imperial China, works which were themselves the products of an intercultural encounter between Jesuit missionaries and Chinese printmakers in Beijing.

One of the sets of prints from China in Mariette's collection can be identified. This is the *Gengzhi tu* (*Illustrations of Tilling and Weaving*), a series of forty-six images illustrating the cultivation of rice and the making of silk commissioned by the Kangxi Emperor, first printed in China in 1696, and reissued periodically during the Qing dynasty.[8] According to the catalog of his estate sale, published in 1775, the set in Mariette's possession was bound with a lengthy manuscript description, in his hand, of the plates and of the process of rice production which twenty-three of the prints depicted. To our knowledge, neither the woodblock prints from Mariette's collection nor his accompanying manuscript have been located, so what, if anything, he might have written about their style and technique, described in the sale catalog as executed with "neatness and detail," is unknown.[9] From the attention to rice cultivation in the manuscript, however, we can reasonably infer that Mariette's interest in the prints straddled the artistic, the technical, and the ethnographic, and that the documentary evidence of the plates took precedence over, or was at least in tension with, their representational

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7 Mariette's Chinese albums are listed in Pierre-François Basan, *Catalogue raisonné des différens objets de curiosities dans les sciences et les arts qui composoient le cabinet de feu M. Mariette* (Paris: G. Desprez, 1775), p. 221, no. 1449 and 1450.

8 Based on Basan's description and a thumbnail sketch of it in the margins of Gabriel de Saint Aubin's copy of the Mariette sale catalog, no. 1449 is almost certainly the *Gengzhi tu.* For Saint-Aubin's sketch see, Pierre Rosenberg et al., *La vente Mariette: le catalogue illustré par Gabriel de Saint-Aubin* (Milan: Electa, 2011), p. 211, sketch beside no. 1449.

9 "beaucoup de netteté & de précision," Basan, *Catalogue raisonné,* p. 221, no. 1449.

conventions. As Emily Teo indicates in her contribution, a similar tension between the artistic and the ethnographic characterized the contents of Duke August of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg's (1772–1822) Chinese Cabinet at Friedenstein Palace in Gotha later in the century. The duke's cabinet was close to his library, and the geographic provenance of his collected artefacts was central to their value; in addition to their aesthetic qualities, they provided material corroboration of information contained in printed sources. Through the example of life-size Chinese mannequins and other imports kept in this collection, Teo shows how malleable constructs of authenticity could be. In Duke August's practice, as in that of other connoisseurs, authenticity was constructed in a circuit that unfolds between the object, the written document, and the expert's judgment.

Contacts with Indo-Persianate collecting and connoisseurial traditions also accelerated in the eighteenth century, with *muraqqaʿ*, or bound collections of calligraphy, drawings, and paintings, circulating between Persia, the Ottoman Empire, the Mughal Empire, and Europe. In these different contexts, the effects on the connoisseurs who encountered such albums were varied. In ca. 1736, Mariette examined a Persian *muraqqaʿ* which had entered the collections of the Royal Library in Paris in 1727 (fig. 2). The French connoisseur was initially drawn to the Safavid codex because of the presence of two sixteenth-century German engravings among the many calligraphy specimens and Persian tinted drawings it contained. His short but informative note describing his encounter with the album, however, betrays a surprised recognition of similarity in difference: Persian connoisseurs were as careful about the conservation of works on paper and as considered in their display as Mariette was about his own collection of prints and drawings. What is more, Mariette's admiration for the album's beautifully framed pages may well have been a catalyst for the ornamental paper mounts the French collector devised for the drawings he had begun amassing by the 1730s (fig. 3). Though some aspects of his mounts were indebted to Italian precedents, Mariette's presentation of his drawings with multiple colored paper borders and rulings was distinctive for its time in Europe.[10]

The *muraqqaʿ* Mariette saw was an unusual purchase for the French Royal Library in the 1720s, but later in the century, as Friederike Weis, Mrinalini Sil, and Charlotte Guichard show, Europeans would become more familiar with the genre. Men like Antoine-Louis-Henri Polier (1741–95) and Jean-Baptiste Gentil (1726–99), who operated within English and French India Company networks, collected and also commissioned Indo-Persianate bound collections during their time on the subcontinent, bringing them home to Europe for collective viewing by their own social networks, or gifting them, as Gentil did in 1785, to the Royal Library in Paris. Weis investigates Mughal albums made for Polier in order to illustrate networks of exchange among connoisseurs

10 On Mariette's encounter with this album, see Kristel Smentek, "From Europe to Persia and Back Again: Border-Crossing Prints and the Asymmetries of Early Modern Cultural Encounter," in *Prints as Agents of Global Exchange, 1500–1800*, ed. Heather Madar (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), pp. 107–25.

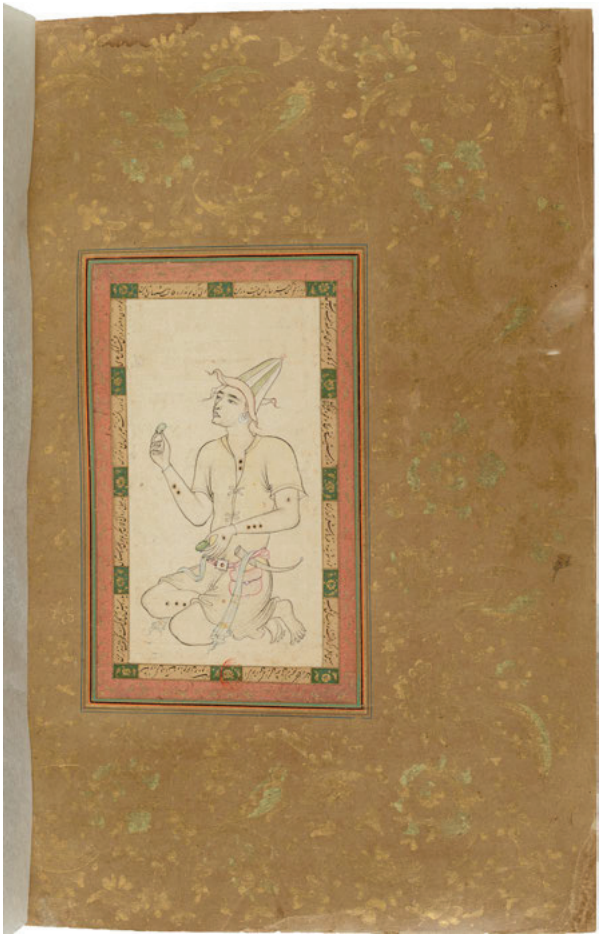

Fig. 2: Unknown artist(s), *Tinted drawing of a seated dervish*, late sixteenth century, mounted on fol. 6v in Persan 129, département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

in India and in Europe and to consider the volumes' audiences in light of contrasting and complementary Indian and European tastes, as well as European antiquarianism and reading habits. Mrinalini Sil reveals how Jean-Baptiste Gentil's collections of Indian paintings were embedded in transregional art networks and power dynamics that extended across cultural and political differences in eighteenth-century India. The contents of Gentil and Polier's albums connected the regional styles and connoisseurial practices of the subcontinent with the tastes and preconceptions of recently arrived Europeans. Despite appreciation for *muraqqaʿ* in their contexts of origin, Charlotte Guichard traces how little consideration Gentil's albums received once they arrived in French institutions. Though the *muraqqaʿ* were vital aspects of Gentil's self-fashioning as a connoisseur in India, he was never really recognized at home during his lifetime for his connoisseurial knowledge and expertise, and the collections he formed were

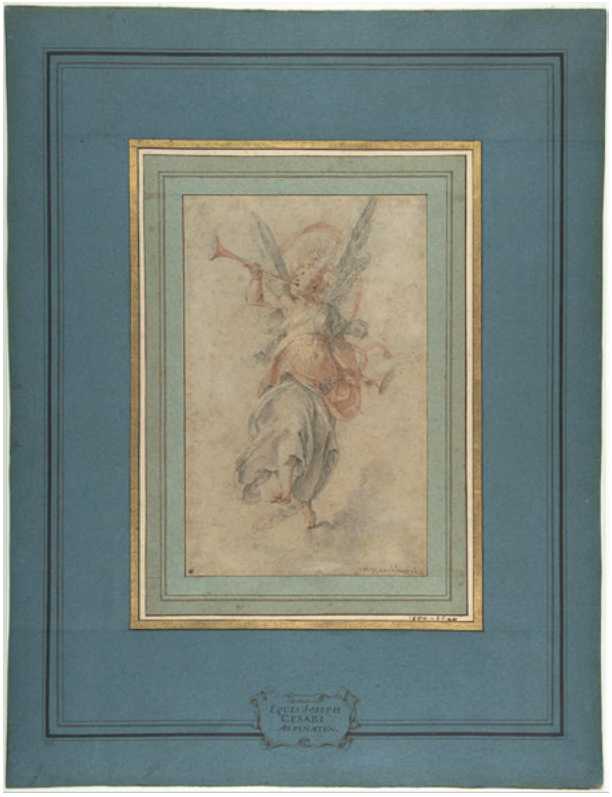

Fig. 3: Cavaliere d'Arpino (Giuseppe Cesari), *Allegorical figure of fame*, ca. 1590, graphite and red chalk, highlighted with white gouache, on light brown paper, 25 × 15.9 cm (drawing), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1986.318

largely ignored until quite recently. As Guichard shows, Gentil's failed attempts to build a reputation for himself in France expose the geopolitical forces, the asymmetries, and the exclusionary understandings of good taste entrenched within European connoisseurial practices of the time.

Much like the French connoisseurs who paid no attention to Gentil's Indian paintings, Mariette had nothing to say about the actual images in the *muraqqaʿ* he saw. He did not comment upon them in his note, and there is no trace of his encounter with them in any of his publications. He may have recognized a kinship between himself and the Persian compiler of the album he saw, but he seems to have rejected its images as worthy of connoisseurial attention. The *muraqqaʿ* arriving in France from Persia and India, the prints from China that Victoria and Mariette studied, and Duke August of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg's Chinese imports attest to the ways in which works from afar often hovered at the edges of eighteenth-century European connoisseurial attention. Art from Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean provided direct, visual evidence of other modes of artmaking. It challenged the uniqueness of European art by exposing

the conventionality of European artistic practice. At the same time, for many European viewers, the perceived lack of perspective and modeling in Persian and Chinese art helped to shore up convictions about the superiority of European art and claims for the progress made by European artists. In Asia, such confrontations between visual cultures also unsettled proven connoisseurs. Caitlin Karyadi examines inter-Asian art and knowledge transfer, and especially the challenges Chinese painting and Chinese art theories posed to long-established connoisseurial practices in eighteenth-century Japan. In response to this "epistemic collision," and to critique local practice by way of Chinese art, Japanese connoisseurs reshuffled established categories of classification and, not unlike Duke August in Gotha, were strategically flexible about authenticity. The (re) shaping of an artistic canon thus involved constant visual and theoretical negotiations between the objects at hand and individual interpretations of them. As several of our authors demonstrate, despite connoisseurial claims to objectivity, genuine appreciation of imported artworks and the development of new critical categories in response to them was frequently constrained by local art theory, inherited antiquarian learning, and preconceptions about, or projections onto, other cultures.[11]

The recurrent references to the works of the past and to their predecessors by the Japanese critics Karyadi discusses highlight the extent to which connoisseurs across Eurasia depended on existing knowledge as well as on their own social and intellectual networks to extend their fields of expertise. Mariette was no exception to this dynamic. Without his relationships with the influential antiquarian, the Comte de Caylus, or Italian scholars such as Giovanni Gaetano Bottari (1689–1775), he would never have been able to develop his eye, gather the collections, and publish the works that established him as one of the leading connoisseurs of his time. These networks were essential and were based on the exchange of information, books, objects, and other items. Facts were consolidated as artefacts were sent back and forth between correspondents, sometimes at a significant distance from one another, and compared, corrected, and complemented until a consensus was reached within the scholarly community. This collective process of knowledge formation and its specific temporality directly contributed to the definition of private connoisseurial expertise. As such, the circulation of things and production of knowledge within connoisseurial networks occasioned a multifaceted apparatus of instruments and techniques, including the production of written texts, prints, copies, and occasionally, fakes that were meant to facilitate scientific exchange, and test expert knowledge.

These practices transformed communication into a multimedia affair as Maureen Cassidy-Geiger shows in her analysis of the archival traces of the purchase made for King August II the Strong (1670–1733) by his agent, Raymond LePlat (1664–1742), at the sale of Cardinal Filippo Antonio Gualtieri's (1660–1728) collection in Rome in the late 1720s. While working for the sovereign in the Eternal City, LePlat sent descriptions,

11 See also Craig Clunas, "The Art of Global Comparisons," in *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Maxine Berg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 165–76.

drawings, and even architectural elevations to Dresden in order to inform the king of his undertakings and fully render the effect of the coveted artworks. Sometimes these elements even filled the same sheets of paper, spilling over into the margins and versos of his letters; these drawings thus transformed the correspondence into a rich source that evolved at the frontier of text and image.

Such exchanges could also be local. Through her study of the short-lived phenomena of *takara awase* (treasure-viewing gatherings) in the city of Edo, Kit Brooks emphasizes the collective dimension of knowledge creation about prized antiquities and imported artefacts during these events, which combined the production of poetry and images centered on objects. *Surimono*—the luxurious, non-commercial printed still life imagery generated during these gatherings—testified to the common experience of viewing valued objects and composing verse together. The makers of *surimono* manipulated pigments, printing technologies, and the qualities of paper to replicate the textures of the treasures they reproduced; the woodblock prints thus materially capture the role of touch, in addition to vision, in connoisseurial practice. Back in Europe, the discovery of major archaeological sites, such as Herculaneum and Pompeii, also prompted reflections on ancient objects and their rendering through engravings. By focusing on the Stamperia Reale in Naples, a press founded by King Charles of Bourbon (1716–88) in 1748, Domenico Pino demonstrates how fine prints illustrating and documenting these archaeological finds were used to transfer new knowledge onto paper, sometimes through highly innovative techniques. In this respect, the plates of *Le Antichità di Ercolano Esposte* (*The Antiquities of Herculaneum Unveiled*, Naples: Stamperia Reale, 1757–92) proposed original solutions for the reproduction of antiquities. Instead of completing the fragmented originals, the printmakers filled the gaps with strokes and dashes. This approach created an interesting visual consequence: by contemplating these voids the viewer became aware of the historical temporal distance that separated him or her from the classical past. It thus left room for personal interpretation but also for discussion and debate among scholars.

Debate is the theme of the hanging scroll with which we began. Though the gathering of scholars seems amicable, historians have argued that, in the context of the late Edo period, the contrasting approaches to knowledge production the three men represent and the varying effectiveness of the firefighting teams depicted above were controversial commentaries on the state of learning in Japan. In this sense, the painting exemplifies the complexity that characterizes the transcultural exchanges analyzed by the contributors to this volume. As they show, the eighteenth-century construction of knowledge about art at a transnational level was uneven. While some collectors and connoisseurs were fully engaged by the alternative forms of art and connoisseurial practice they encountered, others were selective, ambivalent, or dismissive, and their aesthetic assumptions remained unchanged or were reinforced. Connoisseurial knowledge in the networked, but geopolitically asymmetrical eighteenth-century world was forged through a series of productive connections and equally generative misunderstandings, each born of cultural negotiations between the self and the other, between the local and the global.