

Wedgwood and the *Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts* (1993):

### A Case for greater Inclusion

An ongoing effort with the Oxford University Press toward a revision of the *Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300-1990s* (OUP 1993) invites revisiting decisions affecting its content. A decision to exclude decorative arts generally excludes all but one isolated artifact documenting Josiah Wedgwood's systematic dissemination of classical iconography that evidenced and promoted a sort of democratized consumption of Greco-Roman taste through the late Eighteenth Century and beyond. Wedgwood's importance in that dissemination notwithstanding, the *OGCMA* indexes merely one questionable item among its ca. 30,000 entries, an artifact that is in fact a Wedgwood but wrongly assigned in the wrong article — s.v. "Iphigenia in Aulis" (ca. 1795), *OGCMA* 603.

My paper argues for Wedgwood's increased presence in the *OGCMA* arguing for a distinction between the firm's derivative works and those several pieces that warrant attention for particular contribution to the Classical Tradition. I would make the case, for instance, for indexing in the article "Athena" the "Britannia Triumphant" attributed to John Flaxman and produced by Wedgwood from 1789-1809; *OGCMA* represents Flaxman by three artworks s.v. "Athena" and several dozen other works in articles from "Achilles" to "Zeus". Or Josiah Wedgwood's personal triumph, the singular Pegasus Vase aka "The Apotheosis of Homer" (1786, British Museum 1786,0527.1), being modeled on a red-figure calyx given by William Hamilton to the British Museum, evidences with particular clarity how pointedly Wedgwood-ware used classical mythological iconography. Such exempla stand apart from the scores of Wedgwood pieces that perpetuate classical iconography on brooches or bowls or vases or tea caddies featuring attractive, if somewhat generic decoration in topical scenes. Work by Nancy

Ramage and other classical art historians has demonstrated that even Wedgwood's most characteristic vignettes of maenads or centaureesses ought to be viewed in the fresh contemporary context of Herculaneum's Bourbon-era discoveries. The 1787 Wedgwood *Catalog of Cameos, Intaglios, etc.* lists the availability of two dozen plaques with "figures from paintings found in the ruins of Herculaneum" including the "Marsyas and young Olympus" that ought to be included in the *OGCMA* s.v. "Marsyas".. At the very least, such Wedgwood pieces that characterize the firm's most pointed inclination to articulate neoclassical taste deserve inclusion in the *OGCMA*.

The *OGCMA* is a really valuable index with serious shortcomings. The on-line revision of the index has space for grouping in the important contributions made to the classical tradition by Wedgwood artisans. So, I propose as my paper the particularized argument for indexing many — but not all — Wedgwood pieces in the *OGCMA*. Wedgwood generally is worth the notice of more students of the classical side of reception-history.