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Performing Travel: Lady Holland's Grand Tour Souvenirs and the House of All Europe

ABSTRACT

This article examines Lady Elizabeth Holland's (1771-1845) deliberate use of the material cache of having travelled in Italy and Spain to re-establish her social standing following a scandalous divorce and so challenges the archetype of the male Grand Tourist collector. After marrying her second husband, Henry Richard Fox (the third Baron Holland), Lady Holland became the formidable hostess of London's most famous political salon, Holland House. Lady Holland's display of artworks and antiquities in the dining room of Holland House, in distinguished company, allowed her to integrate herself into Britain's Classical heritage whilst maintaining the genteel female role of the hostess and social facilitator. Her acquisition of natural specimens whilst travelling also opened up scholarly connections, which allowed her to pursue her own scientific interests. Lady Holland's travel journals, personal correspondence and catalogues of Holland House's contents provide unusually rich and detailed records of her collecting. This article adds to the growing scholarship on women's travel writing and also contributes the emerging area of research which looks at the gendering of material culture.

Performing Travel

In 1789 Lady Elizabeth Holland (1771-1845) visited her friend Lord Boringdon's Saltram Estate in Devon. Whilst acknowledging that his apartments were 'excellent', because they boasted several fine pictures and a pleasing outlook, she regretted that 'Switzerland, Italy, the Tyrol, and Nice have rendered me difficult about picturesque and grand views, therefore I am less inclined to be enthusiastic than most people'.¹ After all, Lady Holland had undertaken her own Grand Tour from 1791-1796. This article is concerned with how Lady Holland used the experience of Italian and Spanish travel, reified through objects, to establish herself more firmly in society following her travels.

¹ Holland, 1908b, p.19. This incident is also referred to by Dolan, 2001, p. 199.



Figure 1 Charles Henry Jeens, after Robert Fagan, *Elizabeth Vassall Fox (née Vassall), Lady Holland (formerly Webster)*, 1874. Line engraving, 14.6 cm x 9.4 cm, National Portrait Gallery.

While it was not wholly unprecedented for British women to set out on a Grand Tour in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the institution was thought of, and continues to be conceived, as an elite male social ritual.² The Grand Tour is generally represented as involving a young landed gentleman who would travel to expand his acquaintance and increase his worldly knowledge through an introduction to the refined society of Paris and the treasured artefacts of Rome, before returning home with a collection of antiquities and natural specimens that displayed his social and political status.³ The importance that eighteenth-century Britons placed on the Grand Tour as a stage for the performance of elite masculinity based on Roman models is clearly seen in Samuel Johnson's statement that,

A man who has not been in Italy, is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see... All our religion, almost all our law, almost all our arts, almost all that sets us above the savages, has come to us from the shores of the Mediterranean.⁴

The depictions of male Grand Tourists interacting with art, sculpture and other antiquities also celebrated the male homosocial camaraderie of the Tour. Women lacked a presence in these works, except as the focus of male desire. As seen in Johan Zoffany's *The Tribuna degli Uffizi* (1772) where the only women are the two Venus' surrounded by gawking men (Fig. 2). Or, Joshua Reynolds' *The Society of Dilettanti* (1777-79), which crudely alludes to the female form through the 'O' sign created by several male Grand Tourists holding ancient gemstones – a visual device that simulated the female genitalia (Fig. 3).⁵

Although the Grand Tour began as an almost wholly male rite of passage, by the latter part of the eighteenth century rising incomes, cheaper and more reliable travel, and changes to the political landscape of Europe made travel increasingly accessible to women.⁶ This in turn changed the way in which the Tour was experienced and understood.⁷ Recent scholarship has examined the role of women in the Grand Tour by asking how gender informed what they saw, what they did, and how they described it.⁸ Nonetheless, while an extensive body of work has

² For a survey of the scholarship see Naddeo, 2005; Wilton-Ely, 2004. On the Grand Tour's role in the construction of elite manhood see Cohen, 1996, pp. 54-63; French and Rothery, 2008; Redford, 1996, pp. 5-25.

³ For example, Buzard, 2002, p. 38; Hibbert, 1974, p. 15; Redford, 1996, p. 14; Withey, 1997, p. 3.

⁴ Boswell, 1791, p. 61.

⁵ Coltman, 2009, p. 176.

⁶ On the changing social backgrounds of Grand Tourists see Ford & Ingamells, 1997; Towner, 1985.

⁷ Stafford, 1984.

⁸ Bohls, 1995; Chard, 1999; Lamb, 2009; Sweet, 2012; Turner, 2001; Walchester, 2007.

considered how elite male Grand Tourists used their souvenirs as a form of cultural capital, female engagement with this practice has remained a neglected area of research⁹ Scholars are only now beginning to challenge the idea that women were only superficial consumers of luxury goods and instead examine the material strategies they used to construct their identities.¹⁰ Never attracting the same amount of attention as those women who published their Grand Tour accounts, Lady Elizabeth Holland (1771-1845) has come down to us as the one-dimensional sharp tongued and domineering wife of Henry Richard Fox, the third Baron Holland (1773-1840). By exploring Lady Holland's deployment of the Grand Tour's cultural capital through the objects she collected during her travels, this article will go some way towards increasing our understanding of her as a multifaceted historical figure and also our understanding of the Grand Tour.



Figure 2 Johan Zoffany, *The Tribuna Degli Uffizi*, 1772-8/9. Oil on canvas, 123.5 x 155 cm, London, The Royal Collection.

⁹ See, for example, Bignamini & Hornsby, 2010; Coltman, 2009; Scott, 2003; Swann, 2001; Wilton & Bignamini, 1996.

¹⁰ See, for example, Baird & Ionescu, 2014; Batchelor & Kaplan, 2007; Berg, 2007; Vickery, 1998, 2009.



Figure 3 Joshua Reynolds, *The Society of Dilettanti*, 1777-9. Oil on canvas, 196.8 x 142.2 cm, London, Society of Dilettanti.

Lady Holland was the sole heiress of Richard Vassall, a wealthy planter in Jamaica, and as such was able to adopt a dominant position within both of her marriages. Her wealth gave her the freedom to travel, write, and collect. Like most other women who could afford to travel to the Continent, Lady Holland was fluent in European languages, had studied history, acquired artistic skills, and subscribed to the same canons of taste as her male counterparts.¹¹ In a letter to her son, Henry Fox, dated 16 May 1828, Lady Holland noted that she had been educated by 'an old friend of my father's', the antiquarian Anthony Storer, who 'struck by my good looks or my character, to a degree adopted me and became my tutor'.¹² Lady Holland also benefited from the period's increasing circulation of French and Italian literature and later in life was able to access the library at Little Holland House (the home of her sister-in-law) which included Grand Tour accounts and a catalogue of the antiquities held at the British Museum amongst other titles..¹³ An entry from Lady Holland's journal reveals wide reading that demonstrates how far genteel British women could take their education given the right circumstances:

I have read since Xmas the D. of Marlbro's *Apology*, Burnet's *History*, ye *XIII. Satire of Juvenal*, Hearne's *Travels into N. America*, Smith on ye figure and complexion of ye human species, Bancroft on dying, some desultory chemistry, *Roderick Random*, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, Leti's *Life of Sixtus V.*, various German and French plays, novels, and trash, Cook's *Third Voyage*, Wolf's *Ceylon*, part of Ulloa's *Voyage*, and some papers in ye memoirs of ye Exeter Society. Frequent dippings into Bayle, Montaigne, La Fontaine, Ariosto. Read ye three first books of Tasso; Ld. Orford's works.¹⁴

Lady Holland's reading list also shows that there was a fascination for travel literature in the late eighteenth century, with very few male or female travellers leaving for Europe without some idea of what they would see there.¹⁵ This led women to make comparisons between what they saw and what they already knew of Italy. In a journal entry, dated 26 December 1783, the literary salon hostess, Mary Berry, proclaimed herself surprised by the Colosseum's immense size upon approach, because she had already 'seen models and views of it' at home.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the writer of the first published female-authored Grand Tour account,

¹¹ Dolan, 2001, p. 18; Sweet, 2012, p. 27.

¹² Holland, 1946, p. 85.

¹³ Staves, 2007; Vickery, 1998, p. 259. British Library, Holland House Papers, Add. MS 52000, Caroline Fox 'A Catalogue of the Books at Little Holland House', 1809-1842.

¹⁴ Holland, 1908a, p. 192.

¹⁵ Sweet, 2012, p. 1.

¹⁶ Berry, 1865, p. 64.

Lady Anna Miller noted that, 'You may from the commonest print, form a very good idea of the entrance into Rome', when she described the city on 11 January 1771.¹⁷



Figure 4 Giuseppe Cades, *Gavin Hamilton Leading a Party of Grand Tourists to the Archaeological Site at Gabii*, 1793. Ink and wash over pencil, Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland.

Like their male counterparts, those women who undertook Grand Tours, aimed to continue their education during their travels. Lady Holland employed Colin Morison (the *ciceroni* of James Boswell and Charles Burney) for a course in Roman antiquities. She records that she 'relished' reading the Italian poets, and that she attended chemical lectures in Turin and Florence.¹⁸ By the time she reached Paestum, in the south of Italy, she considered her own connoisseurship advanced enough to bestow judgements on antiquities, dismissing the Doric pillars as 'too uneven... squat and clumsy' in a journal entry from 1793.¹⁹ Several sketches show that Lady Holland was not alone. Giuseppe Cades' *Gavin Hamilton Leading a Party of Grand Tourists to the Archaeological Site at Gabii* (1793) depicts a group of male

¹⁷ Miller, 1776a, p. 22.

¹⁸ Holland, 1908b, pp. 7, 32, 130.

¹⁹ Holland, 1908a, p. 128.

and female Grand Tourists being led to a newly discovered archaeological site (Fig. 4). Henry Tresham's *Grand Tourists Purchasing Antiquities* (1790), meanwhile, portrays a group of both sexes around a table examining various busts, vases, bronzes, lamps and tripods brought to them by excavators (Fig. 5).



Figure 5 Henry Tresham, *Grand Tourists Purchasing Antiquities*, 1790. Pen and ink greywash. Private Collection.

British women also collected antiquities while travelling to represent their familiarity with Britain's cultural heritage when displayed at home. While travelling through Italy with her children in 1793-4, the recently widowed Sarah Bentham purchased four vases and a *Sleeping Venus* at the 'Pisanis Manufactory of Alabaster' and had a full-length portrait painted by Angelica Kauffman.²⁰ During her six-month Grand Tour in 1770, Lady Miller purchased an antique Roman urn, 'a few excellent pictures', 'a couple of deal-boxes' containing 'antique bits of mosaic', and an 'ample collection' of Piranesi prints.²¹ Lady Holland amassed a similar collection in addition to natural specimens that reflected her own interests in mineralogy. These included: 'many good specimens' an 'old Barnabite monk' gave her, such as 'his Andularia, a

²⁰ Ford & Ingamells, 1997, p. 78.

²¹ Miller, 1776a, pp. 131, 154, 157; 1776b, pp. 218, 282.

species of feldspar he has discovered', and other samples from the Electorate of Saxony and Montjovet Piedmont.²²

Nonetheless, while their status entitled late eighteenth-century female Grand Tourists to subscribe to the same canons of taste as their male counterparts and acquire souvenirs, as historian Rosemary Sweet has outlined in her work on the Grand Tour, their gender prevented them from claiming the authority of the traveller.²³ Women were excluded from becoming members of key antiquarian or scientific institutions, like the Society of the Dilettanti, the Royal Society, or the Linnaean Society.²⁴ In addition to this practical exclusion, they were culturally constructed as foils against which to define the 'man of taste' as an educated, property-owning gentleman, and an ideal of feminine modesty discouraged them from 'obtruding their knowledge on the public'.²⁵ In the face of this marginalisation, Lady Holland subtly manipulated her Grand Tour collection into a natural extension of polite sociability and domesticity by enlisting it within the accepted genteel female realm of the salon – that is, a gathering of mixed-gender conversation presided over by a woman. By deploying her Grand Tour souvenirs in this way, Lady Holland excused her claim to the authority of travelling subject and thereby laid claim to forms of knowledge and expertise from which she would normally have been excluded.

Lady Holland began her Grand Tour in 1791 as the wife of Sir Godfrey Webster (1747-1800). Her marriage was not a happy one, with Elizabeth describing her much older husband in a journal entry from July 1797 as a 'pompous coxcomb' who had 'squandered' her 'youth, beauty, and... good disposition'.²⁶ During the tours, Elizabeth had an affair with Lord Holland (1773-1840) (nephew of the great Whig leader Charles James Fox) and promptly divorced and remarried upon her return home. For this, the new Lady Holland was ostracised by polite society. Her ignominy can be seen in the reactions described in a letter from the twelve-year-old Harriet Cavendish to her sister when she saw the newly married couple at Astley's Circus in 1798:

²² Holland, 1908a, pp. 9, 63-4.

²³ Sweet, 2012, p. 27.

²⁴ See, for example, Averley, 1986.

²⁵ On the gendering of the language of taste see Barrell, 1992; Bohls, 1995. Women were discouraged from 'obtruding their knowledge on the public' in prescriptive etiquette books and in educational books, like Jackson, 1797, pp. 238-39.

²⁶ Holland, 1908a, p. 159.

My aunt [Lady Holland's good friend Lady Bessborough] moved all her ten fingers at once, Mr and Mrs Peterson made signs, Lady Liz twisted her shawls with a forbidding glance, Caroline held up her head a little higher than usual, John reddened and I, who did not know who she was, thought it rather strange that a poor lady looking so demure and quiet should cause such evident confusion.²⁷

To support her husband's political career and remedy this marginalisation Lady Holland organised dinners for up to fifty guests at her own house in Kensington, inspired by her attendance at the Countess of Albany's *conversazioni* in Florence (Fig. 6).²⁸ Although these dinners had little effect on the attitudes of the other women in her milieu, Lady Holland's male contemporaries came to beg for an invitation. One guest, the diarist Charles Greville, observed that although everyone who went to Holland House found 'something to abuse or to ridicule in the mistress of the house, or its ways, all, continue to go... It is the house of all Europe'.²⁹ Lady Holland's souvenirs played a central role in forming 'the house of all Europe'. Her collection allowed her to actively shape and direct the conversation of a wide network of politicians (such as, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Sir Walter Scott, and Tallyrand), scientists (including, the German geographer and explorer, Alexander von Humboldt, and Count Rumford – an American who set up the Royal Institution in Albemarle Street), and writers (like, Lord Byron, Charles Dickens, Henry Luttrell, Thomas Macaulay, and Thomas Moore).³⁰

Visitors to Holland House were welcomed by a 'sideboard rich and glittering with venerable family plate', artworks bought in Rome by Guido Reni and Titian, as well as classical landscapes, and, 'vases, carvings of ivory... [and] filigree-work... collected by her Ladyship during her journey to Italy'.³¹ These were displayed in an interior inspired by antiquity including carpets designed by the antiquarian Samuel Lysons to imitate recently discovered Roman pavements.³² While guests discussed 'etymology. Painting. Oratory... Botany and natural history', they were served local delicacies from the countries of the Hollands' many foreign visitors.³³ Over this

²⁷ Granville, 1940, p. 7.

²⁸ Ilchester, 1937, p. 136.

²⁹ Greville, 1875, p. 236.

³⁰ Schmid, 2013, pp. 99-100. For biographical sketches of Lady Holland's guests see also Sanders, 1969.

³¹ H. Holland, 1872, p. 228; Liechtenstein, 1874, p. 244.

³² Dolan, 2001, p. 262.

³³ Lord Aberdeen, 3 January 1819, quoted in Wright, 1989, p. 101. Sanders, 1969, pp. 66-67.

cosmopolitan fare, it appeared that 'many likenesses [were] speaking to them from [the dining room's] crimson damask walls'.³⁴



Figure 6 John Wykeham Archer, *Holland House*, 1857. Watercolour over graphite, 27 x 37.2 cm, London, British Museum.

Amongst these likenesses was a portrait of Lady Holland herself, painted by the Rome-based British artist Robert Fagan in 1793. She is shown standing in front of a Roman column surrounded by sun dappled vine leaves (Fig. 1), her flowing ivory dress and loose curls in the late eighteenth-century neo-classical style. Behind her, the vine leaves frame a hazy view of the Bay of Naples, with the Castel del Ovo and a smoking Mount Vesuvius visible in the distance. In his study of eighteenth-century English manners, Paul Langford has observed that eighteenth-century 'dining was more than socialising, because it constituted a kind of public legitimacy'.³⁵ Lady Holland's legitimacy was boosted by the quality of the company around her table and also this portrait which looked down on her guests as they dined. The portrait integrated Lady Holland into Britain's Classical cultural heritage by demonstrating her first-hand experience of the ancient city, where 'I never in my life experienced the degree of happiness enjoyed: it was the gratification of mind and sense'.³⁶ Male

³⁴ Liechtenstein, 1874, p. 244.

³⁵ Langford, 2001, p. 235.

³⁶ Holland, 1908a, p. 26.

Grand Tourists usually chose to stage their portraits in front of the antiquities of Rome, with their connotations of political virtue and military splendour, rather than Naples' *campagna felix*, with its more problematic connotations of luxury and indulgence.³⁷ However, this ancient city, where generations of wealthy Romans had built their villas and relaxed, was perhaps regarded by Lady Holland as a more appropriate setting for a genteel female hostess and social facilitator to display her engagement with antiquity.

Lady Holland's portrait also provided a material context for her to describe her experience of climbing Vesuvius. Although this might seem like an unusual activity, it was undertaken by many of the women who visited Naples. In 1788 the illustrator Ann Flaxman and her husband ascended Vesuvius. She had trouble reaching the top, but soldiered on after taking 'an additional draught of strong Beer' and 'brought up the rear most gallantly singing'.³⁸ Lady Holland's journal includes scientific observations of the Tora del Greco's 'stratum of fresh lava'. In a journal entry dated 9 February 1796 she wrote that it was 'of a peculiar texture, more charged with metallic particles than any of the other strata from Vesuvius, though not equal in specific gravity to that at Ischia' and that 'the density of the atmosphere mark[ed] the source of the lava'.³⁹ In Britain, this level of physical activity and objective observation would have been considered against the norms of appropriate female behaviour, but, as Sweet has highlighted, Vesuvius's exceptional quality as a unique natural phenomenon allowed British women to undertake such unfeminine pursuits without incurring disapproval'.⁴⁰

Once the salon was established, the Hollands expanded their collection with a collection from two trips to Spain in 1803-05 and 1808-09. Lord Holland employed the couple's Spanish souvenirs to promote himself as Spain's unofficial ambassador during the Peninsular War (1807-14). While Lady Holland's travel journal reveals that she used the same collection to integrate herself into contemporary Spanish culture and so display a worldly sophistication that went beyond even the typical male Grand Tourist's classical connoisseurship.⁴¹

Guests who perched on the green and gold couches and Gobelin tapestry chairs of the Hollands' great drawing room, would find works by the Spanish artist Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682). One of these – a small octagonal painting *Holy Family with the Infant Saint John* (1670; Lansdowne Collection, Bowood, Wiltshire) – was presented to Lord Holland by the leader of the Spanish liberals, Gaspar Melchor de

³⁷ James, 2001.

³⁸ Quoted in, Sweet, 2012, p. 55.

³⁹ Holland, 1908a, p. 143.

⁴⁰ Sweet, 2012, p. 56.

⁴¹ Tobin, 2010.

Jovellanos, in Cadiz in 1809.⁴² As a diplomatic gift this painting played an important role in Lord Holland's development of a political relationship with the Spanish liberals, who he conceived as an extension of the Whig agenda in England.⁴³ However, this painting also allowed Lady Holland to display her exceptional first-hand understanding of Spanish art. During her time in Spain Lady Holland studied Murillo's paintings, and others by El Greco, Goya, Ribera, and Velázquez, under the guidance of the statesman and philosopher Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos.⁴⁴ In her journal, Murillo emerges as Lady Holland's favourite artist. On 14 February 1809 she claimed the 'good luck' of seeing his *Death of Saint Clare* (1646) at the Convent of the Franciscans, Seville, which she described as 'the finest without all comparison'.⁴⁵ At Holland House the couple also displayed an 'admirable sketch in crayons' of this fresco that they had commissioned in Spain. This sketch would have been particularly esteemed by their guests, especially once Lady Holland informed them that the original had already been 'considerably injured' by moisture from the air when she viewed it.⁴⁶

A closer look at Lady Holland's journal shows that other Spanish souvenirs provided a material context from which she could show off her engagement with Spanish culture. The small Malaga figures that were kept in a glass case in the anteroom adjoining the Hollands' sitting room captured cultural amusements that Lady Holland took care to record in her journal in great detail.⁴⁷ The miniature fandango dancers mirrored the Spanish dancing Lady Holland enjoyed with the 'townspeople' of Elche, Baix Vinalopó, on 12 April 1803, when she 'sent for musicians who played *boleros, seguidillas*, and *ye fandango*'.⁴⁸ The miniature bull fighters, meanwhile, recalled the 'national amusement' that Lady Holland had experienced on 31 May 1803, when she saw the '*banderilleros*... equipped in the richest and most perfect Spanish costume' and the picadors, with their 'large-brimmed, shallow white hat[s], leather breeches and gaiters, and... brown coloured vest[s]' turning 'the fury of the bull'.⁴⁹ In addition to their artworks, the Hollands also imported a whole flock of Spanish Merino sheep that reflected Lady Holland's interests in the country's wool production. In two separate journal entries, she carefully noted that the quality of the wool 'depended on the migrations of the sheep' and also the '*mesta*, a code of laws which grant almost unlimited privileges to company who possess the *merino*

⁴² Stratton & Brown, 2002, p. 68.

⁴³ Mitchell, 1980, pp. 223, 231.

⁴⁴ Holland, 1910, p. 121.

⁴⁵ Faulkner & West, 1820, p. 119; E. V. F. Holland, 1910, p. 279.

⁴⁶ Holland, 1910, p. 279.

⁴⁷ Faulkner & West, 1820, p. 112.

⁴⁸ Holland, 1910, p. 38.

⁴⁹ Holland, 1910, p. 64.

flocks'.⁵⁰ Although Lady Holland's journal remained unpublished during her lifetime, her Spanish souvenirs thus served to materially signal her understanding of Spanish culture in Britain. This cultural capital served the Hollands well at a time when the public were desperate to receive the most up-to-date information on the progress of the Peninsular War and find out more about a mysterious country largely unknown to British tourists.

At the centre of Holland House lay a room essential to any eighteenth-century estate, a cabinet of curiosities. The Hollands' Journal Room included black mahogany bookcases crowded with a 'complete collection of the volcanic eruptions of Mount Vesuvius, and the correspondent volcanoes of Lipari and Ischia' as well an extensive collection of minerals, stuffed birds, and insects.⁵¹ It is clear that this cabinet reflected Lady Holland's scientific interests, rather than her husband's. Although Lord Holland had scientific family connections and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in December 1811, he rarely attended its meetings.⁵² Lady Holland, on the other hand, collected natural specimens throughout her Grand Tour prior to meeting her second husband, documented her scientific interest in the natural environment in her journal, and, studied under Europe's key scientific scholars, including: the Professor of Pharmaceutical Chemistry at Turin, Costanzo Benedetto Bonvincino; the director of the Natural History Museum in Florence, Felix Fontana; and the chair of natural history at Pavia, Lazzaro Spallanzani, who Lady Holland described as 'a man who has made some filthy experiments upon digestion'.⁵³

As Marjory Swann has observed, collecting and travel were 'mutually sustainable activities' during this period because the experience of travel was represented in collections of foreign rarities, and an individual's desire to travel was inspired by the experience of such collections.⁵⁴ Like the male Grand Tourists Swann has studied, Lady Holland's personal correspondence reveals that she used the collecting of natural specimens as an opportunity to meet male scientists during her Tour, and subsequently used her scientific studies as a means to integrate herself into the exclusively male scientific network upon her return home. For example, on 7 November 1797 the physician William Drew wrote to thank Lady Holland for a 'precious' 'Topaz of Saxony' she had sent him from the Schnakenstein mine, near Auerbach, and also thanked her for her 'observations on the Bohemian Mountains & the Turnpike roads in Austria'.⁵⁵ On 11 August 1798, two years after her return to

⁵⁰ Holland, 1910, pp. 37, 83, 362.

⁵¹ Faulkner & West, 1820, p. 91.

⁵² Wright, 1989, p. 100.

⁵³ Holland, 1908a, pp. 7, 9, 51.

⁵⁴ Swann, 2001, p. 23.

⁵⁵ BL, Holland House Papers, Add. MS 51814.

England, Lady Holland received a letter from the Florentine botanist, Targioni Tozzetti, thanking her for a gift of wooden models of various crystals she had previously bought from C.H. Titus while she was in Saxony.⁵⁶

Such contacts continued to multiply and Lady Holland formed an ever-increasing web of scholarly connection, as collectors asked her to forward specimens on to their own esteemed acquaintances. For example, when the founding donor of the Smithsonian, James Smithson, sent Lady Holland some specimens from Dover on 10 November 1801, he also 'took the liberty to' include 'a small parcel' for Dr Gruber – a natural philosopher known for his translations of the various works of the German chemist, Martin Heinrich Klaproth.⁵⁷ In preparation for Lady Holland's second trip to the Continent in 1800, a merchant trading with Spain and the Baltic, Robert Gordon, also sent her a letter of introduction to the German geologist, Johann Gottfried Schmeisser, and a copy of one of his books on mineralogy which he hoped 'may be useful', for it would certainly gratify 'the author to know you are acquainted with his system'.⁵⁸ By amassing natural specimens during her Grand Tour and then financially supporting male scientists to help her continue to build her collection upon her return home, Lady Holland supported, and essentially directed, an international male scientific network that allowed her to pursue her own scientific interests.

This examination of Lady Holland's use of the experience of travel, reified through objects, to socially establish herself and claim knowledge and expertise expands our understanding of the Grand Tour and contributes to our growing understanding of eighteenth-century women as active participants in collecting and study. Lady Holland used her collection of artworks, antiquities, and natural specimens in a manner that was in keeping with her gendered role as hostess and social facilitator. By such means she managed to manipulate the period's gender norms and developing consumer culture of travel to lay claim to the Tour's cultural capital in new ways. Lady Holland employed her souvenirs to gesture outward – towards her links to Italy's ancient Roman past, her familiarity with Spanish culture, and her connections to Europe's key scientific scholars. This allowed her to integrate herself into a Classical cultural heritage and pursue scientific interests, from which she would normally have been excluded as a woman. On the one hand it is clear that Lady Holland was exceptional for her time, both in terms of the opportunities she had and how she took advantage of them. However, we are also fortunate to have rich and detailed records on which to draw to understand Lady Holland. Her journals and personal correspondence, have provided a rare opportunity to recover and understand the possibilities female travellers could realise by using objects to

⁵⁶ BL, Holland House Papers, Add. MS 51845.

⁵⁷ BL, Holland House Papers, Add. MS 51845.

⁵⁸ BL, Holland House Papers, Add. MS 51846.

negotiate a patriarchal system and develop an autonomous place within it given the right circumstances.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1. Charles Henry Jeens, after Robert Fagan, *Elizabeth Vassall Fox (née Vassall), Lady Holland (formerly Webster)*, 1874. Line engraving, 14.6 cm x 9.4 cm, National Portrait Gallery.

Fig. 2. Johan Zoffany, *The Tribuna Degli Uffizi*, 1772-8/9. Oil on canvas, 123.5 x 155 cm, London, The Royal Collection.

Fig. 3. Joshua Reynolds, *The Society of Dilettanti*, 1777-9. Oil on canvas, 196.8 x 142.2 cm, London, Society of Dilettanti.

Fig. 4. Giuseppe Cades, *Gavin Hamilton Leading a Party of Grand Tourists to the Archaeological Site at Gabii*, 1793. Ink and wash over pencil, Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland.

Fig. 5. Henry Tresham, *Grand Tourists Purchasing Antiquities*, 1790. Pen and ink greywash. Private Collection.

Fig. 6. John Wykeham Archer, *Holland House*, 1857. Watercolour over graphite, 27 x 37.2 cm, London, British Museum.

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