THE HAMILTON NETWORK: QUANTIFYING THE INFLUENCE OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ANTIQUITIES DEALERS

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Going on a Grand Tour in the eighteenth century was not only about experiencing the present, but also about developing an appreciation for the past. Places like Paestum, Pompeii, and Herculaneum that had been settled long before their rediscovery were quickly becoming hotspots for both tourists and native Italians alike. The allure of antiquity in Italy was twofold: some tourists were of an older generation who had a classical education who wanted to see the objects perhaps they had learned about, whereas there was another group of tourists who went to Italy as a part of their classical education, taking courses on ancient art in order to return to England more enriched. Towards the latter half of the century, the antiquities boom had resulted in there being a large number of antiquarians and dealers looking to make money in what had proven to be a very lucrative business, but there were only a select few that held the majority of the power. Over the course of this paper, I will look to prove who these men were, and how their control over the art market in the eighteenth century shaped not only the British taste in art but also how we think about the origins and provenance of antiquities today.

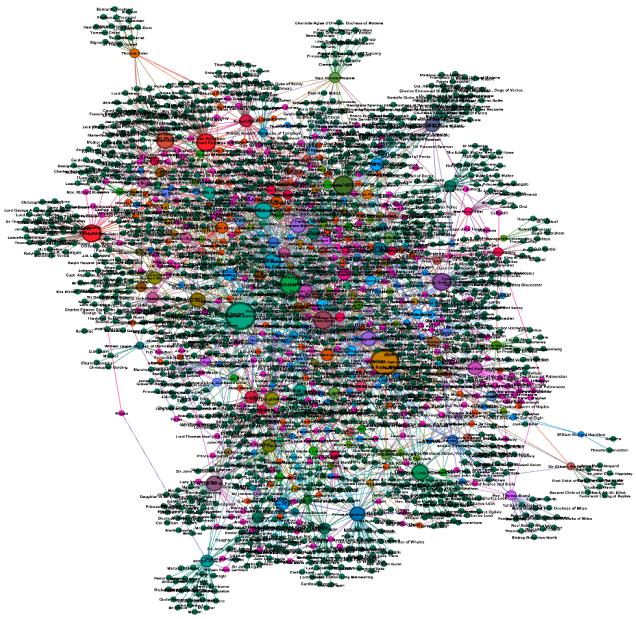
In John Brewer's "Whose Grand Tour?"(2012), there are claims made about which men were amongst the most powerful in this particular market in Italy during this period. He claims that "no figure achieved greater stature than Sir William Hamilton, the British envoy extraordinary and and minister plenipotentiary, whose power in Naples as courtier to the Bourbons, British guide, collector, and volcanologist was unsurpassed"(55), in the context of describing how diplomats and merchants increased in importance. However, while diplomats and merchants tend to be people that have a very large sphere of influence, it is not always clear if they have the understanding or passion needed to succeed similarly when it comes to art and antiquity. And, while it may be true that Sir William Hamilton was extremely influential in Naples, there were certainly others who were similar in other regions: "Similarly, although there

had always been dealers helping those in pursuit of antiquities and art… none could match the power and importance of Thomas Jenkins, Gavin Hamilton, and James Byres in Rome, men at the pinnacle of what had become a growing and sometimes lucrative profession"(55). Should this prove to be the case, and assuming that Brewer's claim that "there was also an extraordinary concentration of power in the hands of very few men,"(55), these four individuals were in pole position to shape not only the antiquities market, but also the taste of the British public.

In order to determine the accuracy of Brewer's claims, I utilized the resources within the Grand Tour Explorer database to create a network of merchants, dealers, and antiquaries, all people associated with Sir William Hamilton, James Byres, Thomas Jenkins, and Gavin Hamilton. By using network theory to measure influence, we should be able to determine how important each of these individuals were, and if there are any other people we should be focused on in this respect. Creating the network relied a lot upon the knowledge contained within the Explorer. There were two potential ways of creating the edges of the network, the first being creating a network of every traveler who was in the same place as our four antiquaries, and the second being forming edges based upon names mentioned in their biographical entries within the database. In the end, the second method was deemed to be superior for two reasons: Firstly, it brought us as close to a guarantee that the two individuals knew each other as possible. For someone to be mentioned in a short biographical entry on someone else's life means that at the very least they knew about each other, and more likely that they had interacted over the course of their life or their respective Tours. Secondly, it narrowed the scope of the network to focusing directly on people who were somehow connected to the antiquities business. The network operates on the assumption that these four individuals know a vast majority of the figures who deal in art and antiquities, and for that reason there are three main "layers" to the edges of the

network. The first layer is formed by the four figures that we want to look at, and the second layer is formed by every name mentioned in the four bibliographical entries in the Grand Tour Explorer Database. The third and final layer is formed by repeating that process again for the second layer, which was done in order to create redundancy and attempt to prevent bias. Because there are only around six thousand entries in the database and significantly fewer entries tied to art and antiquity, the third layer was crucial because it ensured that there weren't any potential key figures that were missing from the network.

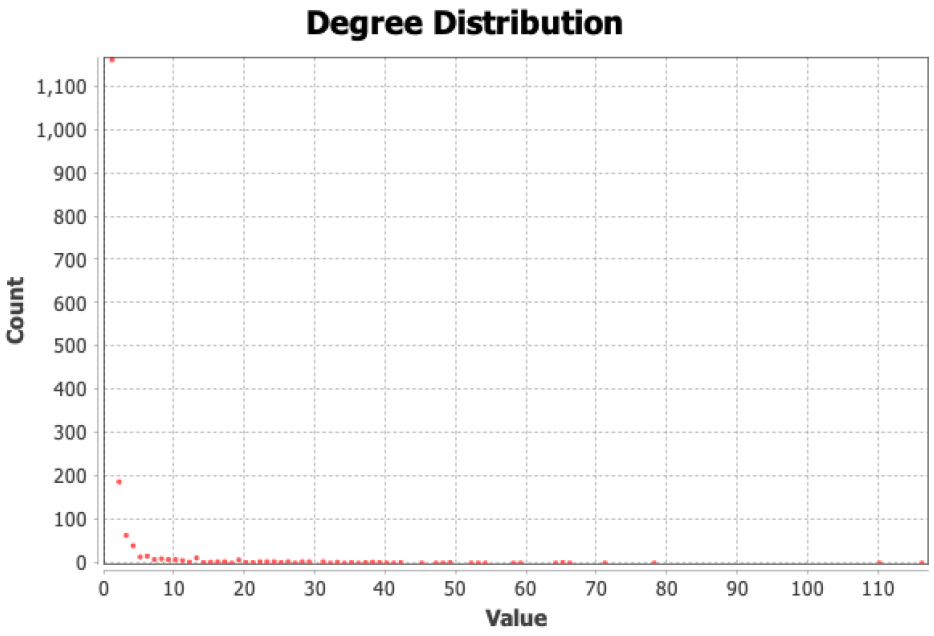
The final output of the network, visualized through Gephi, can be seen in Figure 1 below:



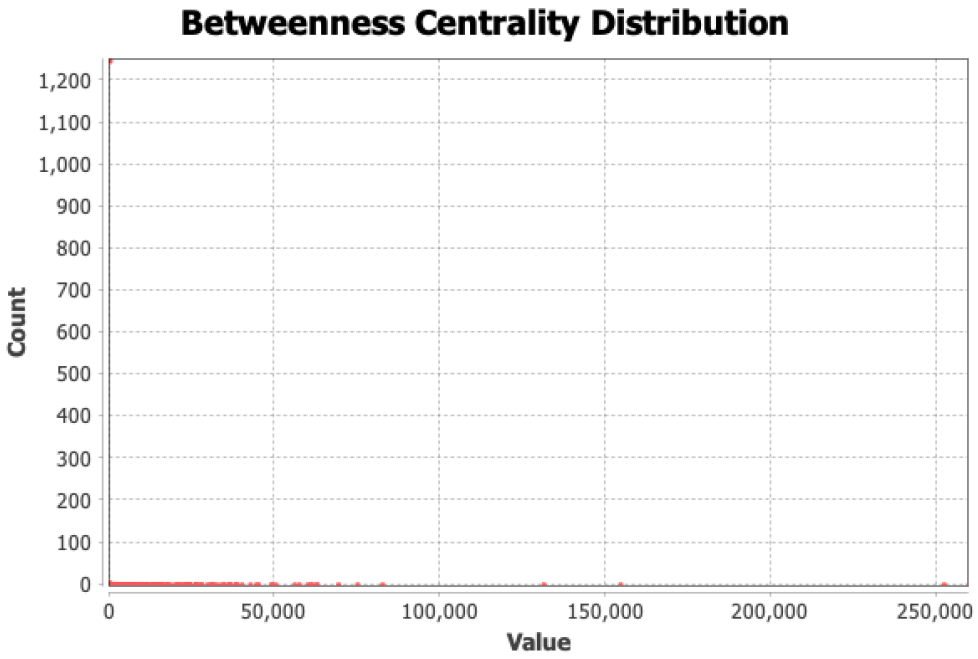
As we can see, Figure 1 as a network is really clustered and there is a lot of excess noise that ends up being visually quite irrelevant. Each color corresponds to a different degree value, and so all of the clusters around the edges are groups of degree one, and the larger nodes in the middle of the network are the ones that have both more connections, and less connections to the smaller nodes around the outside. If we filter out the noise, we can see that there are actually some

important insights to be made when it comes to the influence of the four individuals we want to look at.

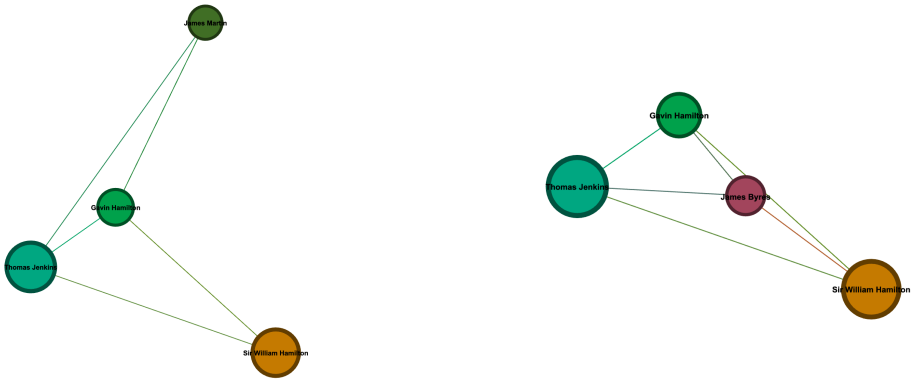
In order to measure what I keep referring to as "influence," there are a few methods that make sense within the context of a network. The two parameters that I chose to focus on are degree and betweenness centrality, since both are related to the number of interactions any given node has with the other nodes in a network, which seemed a fitting measure of the influence or control any of our individuals held over the network as a whole. Figure 2 depicts the degree distribution for the network:



And figure 3 depicts the betweenness centrality scores for the network:



As figure 2 shows, there are a large number of nodes with low degree values, as represented by the green nodes on the outside of the network, but there are also a few nodes with very high degrees. The same goes for betweenness centrality, with the majority of nodes having low scores with the exception of a select few that act as outliers when it comes to the distribution. If we look at the top four nodes for degree and betweenness centrality respectively:



We see that three of the four individuals in question appear when filtering by highest degree values, and each of Sir William Hamilton, Thomas Jenkins, James Byres, and Gavin Hamilton

appear in the top four nodes with highest betweenness centrality. By these metrics, it is clear that these four individuals all had a major part to play not only in the network but also in the art and antiquities market during the Grand Tour.

As a case study, let us examine some of what we know about Sir William Hamilton. Despite the interconnected nature of these four individuals, I chose to focus on Sir William Hamilton specifically because of how well documented he is, both for good and for bad. In studying the network we can see that he has not only connections with members of the aristocracy, but also with politicians and even King George III. One such politician, Horace Walpole, maintained constant correspondence with Hamilton throughout the course of his travels, and it is in these documents that we can see the true influence that Hamilton held over British taste in art. In one such letter Hamilton writes: "Excuse the liberty I take in sending you a table made out of a fragment of Gothic Saracen mosaic that I got from a church at Salerno, and which accompanies the mosaic I had the pleasure of sending you from Rome… Don't be scrupulous of accepting this trifle as I do assure you it cost me little"(Walpole 1973, 409) Two things worth mentioning here are the nonchalant nature with which Hamilton speaks about sending his friend some pieces, and the apparent ease with which he is able to do so. He asks Walpole to "excuse the liberty" he takes, almost to apologize for being a good friend with good taste and connections. He also reassures Walpole that "it cost me little," so it was either easy, cheap, or both for him to acquire such goods.

Perhaps the largest contributor to Hamilton's legacy was the sale of his collection to the British Museum nineteen years after its founding charter ("The British Museum First Opened to the Public on 15 January 1759. – Italian Art Society."). He references his work on this collection in another letter to Walpole, telling him: "You shall see that I have not been idle since I have

been here, and the lovers of antiquity will I think be obliged to me for enriching our country with a most singular collection"(Walpole 1973, 409). This is no longer simply a matter of interpersonal connections between men, instead it grew into something much greater. Hamilton and Walpole were friends, colleagues, and business partners in a sense, and Hamilton shared similar business arrangements with many other men, but his sale of his collection to the British Museum is perhaps one of his most consequential dealings. At the time of their acquisition, the antiquities that were previously in Hamilton's collection were a part of the foundation of the British Museum's display. For the better part of thirty years, Hamilton's collection in the British Museum was the primary taste of Greek and Roman antiquity that the British public got. He was also a published author, who "greatly influenced English decorative artists, artisans, and scholars of the period. It was Hamilton's primary hope to inspire artists with the depictions of his collection"(Fultz 2018). Aside from influencing the general British taste in art and antiquities, as we see here he also wanted to influence British artists. In fact, quite a few artists are in the second layer of nodes in our network, and even James Martin appears to have been highly influential himself during this time.

However, in order to amass such a collection and appease his customers, at times Hamilton had to resort to some unsavory methods to get the job done. To begin with, Hamilton "requested permission (in French) from the Secretary of State, Bernardo Tanucci, to export some antique coins from the region… The reply came back the same day from the king (in Spanish), saying that it was prohibited by the laws of the kingdom to export any antiquities, and that he was sorry to say that Hamilton could export neither coins nor any other antiquities from the Sicilies"(Ramage 1990, 471). History tells us that Hamilton was certainly able to export those antiquities, and so we have to question the ramifications of his actions. Turning instead to how

he actually procured these antiquities, there appears to be a similar story. Hamilton "is reported to have spent a few days there [at Trebbia] living with a peasant, so as to excavate some tombs incognito. He then carried off the best vases for his collection … Tanucci is said to have regarded his excavations there as a rather serious transgression"(Ramage 1990, 473). Just like with smuggled goods, Hamilton's actions set a serious precedent for both what is acceptable and the lengths that these dealers and antiquarians would go to in order to collect. This is clearly not an isolated incident, as at one point in their correspondence Walpole tells Hamilton to "ransack Herculaneum, sift Pompeii, give us charming vases, bring us Corregios and all Eturia"(Walpole 1973, 416). To have a proper archaeological license to dig is one thing, to "ransack" a historical site is a completely different story, and one that doesn't always have a happy ending.

While there can be no doubt that the likes of Sir William Hamilton, Thomas Jenkins, James Byres, and Gavin Hamilton had an extremely large impact on the antiquities and art market not only during the 18th century but even later as well, one must also consider the negative effects their actions have had on that same market. While Sir William Hamilton is the one under the microscope in this particular instance, he is not the only one with less than honest motives at times. This period in time is the beginning of the world's interest in antiquity, and Hamilton is responsible in part for setting a dangerous precedent which is still being fixed today. It would not be possible for the likes of Giacomo Medici to amass their empire without the efforts of Sir William Hamilton, who was perhaps the first, or at the very least the first significant dealer, to skirt around the law when it came to excavating and exporting goods. Even today, the "180 stolen, trafficked pieces"(Mashberg 2021) that Michael Steinhardt had to surrender very recently are part of a system that relies heavily on the actions of Hamilton in the eighteenth century. In the end, we can trace today's questions and scrutiny over the provenance

of art and antiquity to the precedents set by the actions of men such as Sir William Hamilton, Thomas Jenkins, James Byres and Gavin Hamilton.

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