

Curtius, Ernst

HName: Curtius, Ernst

DateBorn: 1814

Placeborn: Lübeck, Germany

Datedied: 1896

Placedied: Berlin, Germany

HDDescrip: Leading archaeologist of ancient Greece in Germany in the late 19th century; his writings were highly art-historical. Curtius was the son of the mayor of Lübeck, Germany. He studied under Friedrich Welcker (q.v.) in Bonn, Karl Otfried Müller (q.v.) in Göttingen, and August Boeckh (1785-1867) in Berlin. Between 1837-40 he lived in Greece as the tutor to the children of the classicist Christian August Brandis (1790-1867), where he became familiar with the monuments. In 1840 he accompanied Müller to Delphi where Müller contracted an illness from which he died. It was Curtius who made the funeral arrangements for burial on Colonus. He returned to Berlin in 1842 and in 1844 secured a position as tutor to Crown Prince Friedrich (later Kaiser) III (1831-1888). Kaiser Friedrich III's enthusiasm for archaeology can be traced to Curtius' teaching. Curtius delivered an oration at the Berlin Singakademie in 1852 on Olympia, in whose presence was the royal family. This gave great impetus to its excavation, though actual work was much delayed because of the Turko-Russian War (1877-78). In 1851 Curtius became editor of the Corpus inscriptionum Graecarum and a member of the Berlin Academy. He was appointed Professor of classical philology at Göttingen in 1853, a position he held until 1867. Curtius' Griechische Geschichte of 1857-61 was the first Greek history written in German. When Friedrich (Eduard) Gerhard (q.v.) died in 1867, Curtius succeeded him as professor of classical archaeology at Berlin and as director of the Altes Museum and Antiquarium. In that position, he convinced the government to nationalize the DAI (German Archaeological Institute) and found a branch in Athens. Curtius finally was able to organize and lead the massive expedition to excavate Olympia (1875-1881) when he was in his sixties. His discoveries there included the sculptures of the Zeus Temple and the so-called "Hermes of Praxiteles." His history of Athens, Stadtgeschichte von Athen, appeared in 1892. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1848-1931) succeeded him in Berlin. Curtius' younger brother Georg Curtius (1820-1885) was an eminent philologist and his grandson the literary historian Ernst Robert Curtius (1886-1956).

Curtius' comprehensive approach to classics was modeled on the methods of his teacher, K. O. Müller. As an archaeologist, Curtius led in cultural patriation of objects. The excavations at Olympus were performed with the agreement that all artifacts found by Curtius and his German crew would remain in Greece. After Curtius, archaeology was no longer a hunt for treasure, but a scientific pursuit. His writing, for example his Griechische Geschichte, could be moralizing; Wilamowitz and others found his writing sentimental. His art-historical writings were collected shortly before his death in his Gesammelte Abhandlungen (1894).

HCountry: Germany

HBiography: Archäologenbildnisse: Porträts und Kurzbiographien von Klassischen Archäologen deutscher Sprache. Reinhard Lullies, ed. Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1988: 39-40. Suzanne L. Marchand. Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996: 77-91; Calder, William. "Curtius, Ernst." Encyclopedia of the History of Classical Archaeology. Nancy Thomson de Grummond, ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996, vol. 1, pp. 341-42; Curtius, Friedrich. Ernst Curtius: Ein Lebensbild in Briefen. Berlin: J. Springer, 1903; Stemplinger, Eduard, editor. Der Münchner Kreis: Platen, Curtius, Geibel, Strachwitz. Leipzig: Reclam, 1933.

HBibliography: Peloponnesos: Eine historisch-geographische Beschreibung der Halbinsel. 2 vols. Gotha: J. Perthes, 1851-1852; and Ascherfeld, Jürgen. Olympia, von Ernst Curtius, mit ausgewählten von Pindar, Pausanias, Lukian. Berlin: Atlantis-verlag, 1935; Die Stadtgeschichte von Athen. Berlin: Weidmann, 1891; Griechische Geschichte. 3 vols. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1878-80, English, The History of Greece. 5 vols. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1886; Gesammelte abhandlungen von Ernst Curtius. Berlin: W. Hertz, 1894 [volume 2, part B contains "Kunstgeschichte."]; editor, from 1851, Corpus inscriptionum graecarum. 4 vols. Berlin: Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1828-77.

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