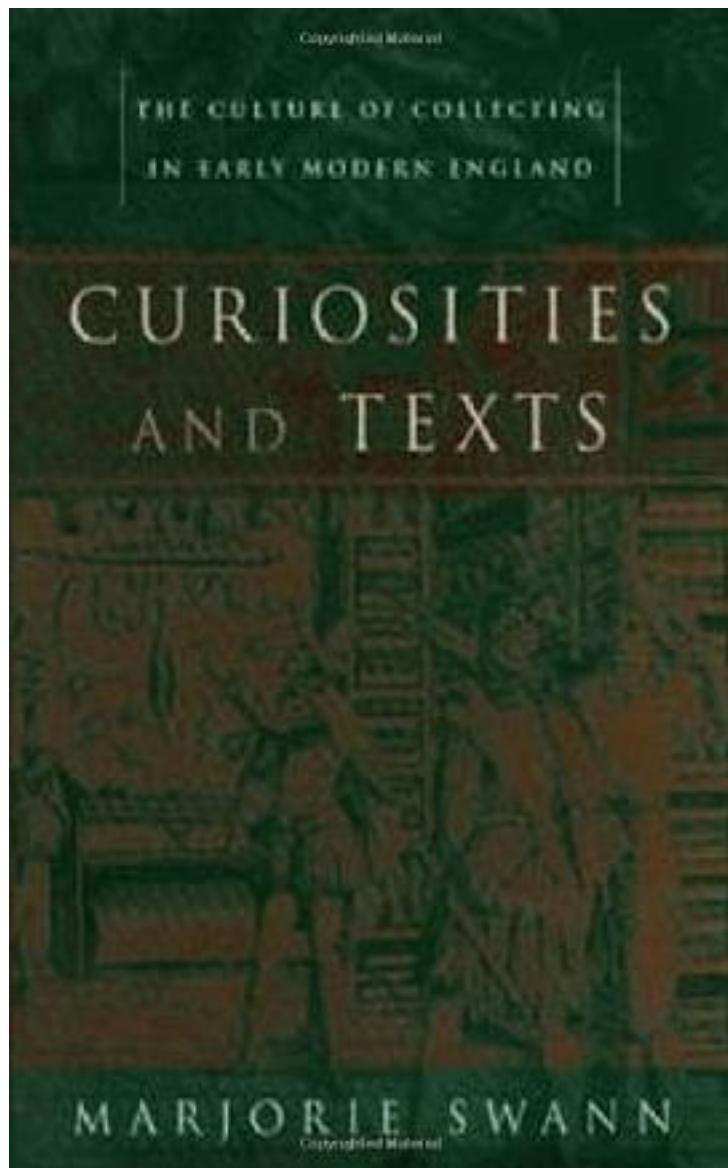


Curiosities and Texts



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A craze for collecting swept England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Aristocrats and middling-sort men alike crammed their homes full of a bewildering variety of physical objects: antique coins, scientific instruments, minerals, mummified corpses, zoological specimens, plants, ethnographic objects from Asia and the Americas, statues, portraits. Why were these bizarre jumbles of artifacts so popular? In *Curiosities and Texts*, Marjorie Swann demonstrates that collections of physical objects were central to early modern English literature and culture. Swann examines the famous collection of rarities assembled by the Tradescant family; the development of English natural history; narrative catalogs of English landscape features that began to appear in the Tudor and Stuart periods; the writings of Ben Jonson and Robert Herrick; and the foundation of the British Museum. Through this wide-ranging series of case studies, Swann addresses two important questions: How was the collection, which was understood as a form of cultural capital, appropriated in early modern England to construct new social selves and modes of subjectivity? And how did literary texts-both as material objects and as vehicles of representation-participate in the process of negotiating the cultural significance of collectors and collecting? Crafting her unique argument with a balance of detail and insight, Swann sheds new light on material culture's relationship to literature, social authority, and personal identity.

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