

**THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUBLIME: HISTORY
AND ARCHITECTURE IN PIRANESI'S
DRAWINGS**

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**by
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ABSTRACT

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUBLIME: HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE IN PIRANESI'S DRAWINGS

In the architectural, historical, and archaeological context of the eighteenth century, Italian architect Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) played an important role. He posited crucial theses in the debates on the 'origins of architecture' and 'aesthetics'. He is numbered foremost among the founders of modern archaeology. But Piranesi was misinterpreted both in his day and posthumously. The vectors of approach yielding misinterpretation of Piranesi derived from two phenomena: one is the early nineteenth-century Romanticist reception of Piranesi's character and work. The second is the mode of codification of architectural history. The former interpretation derived from Piranesi's position on aesthetics, the latter from his argument concerning origins. Both of these served the identification of Piranesi as 'unclassifiable'. He has thus been excluded from the 'story' of the progress of western architectural history.

Piranesi, however, conceived of these two debates as one interrelated topic. Concerning origins, he developed a history of architecture not based on the East/West division, and supported this by the argument that Roman architecture depended on Etruscans which was rooted in Egypt. Secondly, he distinguished Roman from Grecian architecture identified with 'ingenious beauty'. Thus Piranesi placed Romans in another aesthetical category which the eighteenth century called 'the sublime'. Piranesi's perception caused him to be described as madman or idiosyncratic. However, most of these evaluations lack a stable historical base. Therefore, restoring Piranesi, his arguments, executed works and drawings to architectural history appear as a necessity.

ÖZET

AŞKIN ARKEOLOJİ: PİRANESİ'NİN DESENLERİNDE TARİH VE MİMARLIK

On sekizinci yüzyılın mimarî, tarihsel ve arkeolojik bağlamlarında önemli rol oynayan İtalyan mimar Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), 'mimarlığın kökeni' ve 'estetik' tartışmalar üzerine etkili tezler ileri sürmüştür. Aynı zamanda modern arkeoloji biliminin kurucuları arasında yer almaktadır. Bununla birlikte, Piranesi hem kendi gününde hem de ölümünden sonra yanlış yorumlanmıştır. Piranesi'nin yanlış yorumlanmasına yol açan yaklaşım iki olguya bağlıdır: birincisi Piranesi'nin eserlerinin doğrudan psikolojik karakterini yansıttığına dair olan, erken on dokuzuncu yüzyılın Romantisist algısıdır. İkincisi ise mimarlık tarihi kodifikasyonundan türeyen yorumdur. İlk tür yorumlar Piranesi'nin estetik tartışmalardaki konumuna dayanırken, ikinci tür yorumlar, mimarlığın kökenine dair öne sürdüğü tezlere eleştiri olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Her iki tür yorum tarzı da Piranesi'yi 'sınıflandırılmaz' kategorisine yerleştirmektedir. Böylece Piranesi, batı mimarlık tarihinin gelişim 'öykü'sünden dışlanmıştır.

Piranesi, iki tartışmayı birbiriyle ilişkili tek bir konu şeklinde ele almaktaydı. Köken tartışmalarında Doğu/Batı ayrımına dayanmayan bir mimarlık tarihi anlayışı geliştiren Piranesi, söz konusu tezini Roma mimarlığının kökeni Etrüsk'e, Etrüsk'ün kökleri ise Mısır'a dayanmaktadır savıyla desteklemişti. Piranesi bu savıyla aynı zamanda estetik tartışmaya da katılmış oluyordu. Çünkü Roma mimarlığının kökenini farklı bir medeniyete dayandırarak, kendi öz mimarlığını 'hünerli güzellik' sözleriyle tanımlanan Yunan mimarlığından ayrı ele alıyor, böylece Roma mimarlığını estetik etki bağlamında başka bir yere, 'yüce' konumuna yerleştiriyordu. Ancak Piranesi'nin mantıklı görünen iddiası onun çılgın ya da tuhaf olarak tanımlanmasına yol açmıştır. Nitekim ithamların çoğu sağlam tarihsel temellere dayanmayan önyargılardan ibarettir. Bu nedenle, Piranesi'yi, tezlerini, uygulanmış eserlerini ve çizimlerini mimarlık tarihi sürecinde yeniden konumlandırmak bir gereklilik olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xv
LIST OF TITLES OF PIRANESI’S PRINTED WORKS FREQUENTLY USED IN THIS THESIS, AND THEIR TRANSLATIONS	xvii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2. WHY IS PIRANESI MISINTERPRETED: <i>LE STYLE C’EST L’HOMME MEME</i>	8
2.1. Identifying Man and Work	8
2.2. Piranesi Fashioned as Romantic “Opium Eater”	15
CHAPTER 3. ARCHITECTURAL BIOGRAPHY OF PIRANESI.....	24
CHAPTER 4. WHY IS PIRANESI MISINTERPRETED: FLETCHER’S <i>TREE OF ARCHITECTURE</i>	74
4.1. ‘Excessive’ and ‘Eclectic’ or Architectural History of Archaeology?	74
4.2. “The Tree of Architecture”	82
CHAPTER 5. ASIA, EUROPE, AFRICA AND HISTORY OF STYLES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY	88
5.1. The Eighteenth-Century Debate on Origins and Its Background	88
5.2. Perception of ‘Orient’ in Piranesi	100
5.3. Piranesi and Scientific Method	107

CHAPTER 6. PIRANESI BETWEEN CLASSICAL AND SUBLIME	117
6.1. Against a <i>vil metier</i>	117
6.2. A Different Classic	120
6.3. A “Disposition” for the Sublime.....	122
6.4. Sublime Characteristics	136
6.5. Beautiful Greece and Modern Sublime	139
 CHAPTER 7. EPILOGUE.....	 142
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 144

LIST OF FIGURES

Unless otherwise indicated, the material below is by Piranesi.

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
Figure 2.1. Felice Polanzani, portrait of Piranesi, <i>Opere varie</i> , 1750.....	11
Figure 2.2. Joseph Nollegen, portrait bust of Piranesi, late 1760s, Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Rome.....	12
Figure 2.3. Michael Rysbrack and Peter Scheemakers, busts of British Worthies, Stowe Gardens, 1729, photography Robert Viau, 2005.....	13
Figure 2.4. Plate VII, <i>Carceri d’Invenzione</i> , 1760.....	16
Figure 2.5. Plate IX, <i>Parere</i> , 1765	22
Figure 2.6. Plate IX, detail, <i>Parere</i> , 1765	22
Figure 3.1. Ferdinando Galli-Bibiena, Copper 23, scene design viewed at an angle, <i>Architettura civile preparata su la Geometri</i> , 1711.....	27
Figure 3.2. <i>Gruppo di Scale, Prima Parte</i> , 1743	28
Figure 3.3. Giovanni Paolo Pannini, <i>View of the Roman Forum</i> , 1735, Detroit Institute of Arts	29
Figure 3.4. <i>Mausoleo antico, Prima Parte</i> , 1743.....	31
Figure 3.5. Elevation of <i>Palatine, Del Palazzo de’ Cesari Verona</i> , 1738	32
Figure 3.6. <i>Carcere oscura, Prima Parte</i> , 1743.....	33
Figure 3.7. <i>Galleria grande di Statue, Prima Parte</i> , 1743.....	33
Figure 3.8. <i>Campidoglio antico, Prima Parte</i> , 1743.....	34
Figure 3.9. <i>Ponte magnifico, Prima Parte</i> , 1743	34
Figure 3.10. Ferdinando Galli-Bibiena, Copper 24, designing scenes by using the method of Venetian painters, <i>Architettura civile</i> , 1711.....	35
Figure 3.11. Plate VI, <i>Carceri d’Invenzione</i> , 1760	36
Figure 3.12. Baldassare Orsini, Plate XIII, <i>Le scene</i> , 1785	37
Figure 3.13. Baldassare Orsini, Plate XI, <i>Le scene</i> , 1785	37
Figure 3.14. Baldassare Orsini, Plate X, <i>Le scene</i> , 1785	38
Figure 3.15. Baldassare Orsini, Plate LXVII, <i>Geometria</i> , 1773	38
Figure 3.16. Jean Barbault, <i>L’Arco di Costantino Monumenti di Roma antica originale, Les plus beaux Monumens de Rome ancienne</i> , 1761	39

Figure 3.17. <i>Veduta dell' Arco di Costantino, Vedute</i> , 1748	40
Figure 3.18. A sketch by Piranesi after Juvarra's design for Amadei's opera <i>Teodosio il Giovane</i> of 1711, British Museum, London, 1908-6- 16-46	41
Figure 3.19. Filippo Juvarra, <i>Scena per angolo</i> , Museo Civico, Turin.....	41
Figure 3.20. Antonio Galli-Bibiena, <i>scénographie</i> , Chicago, Phyllis B. Lambert Collection.....	41
Figure 3.21. <i>Pianta di ampio magnifico collegio, Opere varie</i> , 1750.....	42
Figure 3.22. Marie-Joseph Peyre, engraved plan of project for an Academy, detail, "Plan d'un bâtiment qui contiendrait les académies," <i>Oeuvres d'architecture</i> , 1765, British Architectural Library, RIBA, London	42
Figure 3.23. Detail of medallion depicting Piranesi and Robert Adam, <i>Campo</i> , 1762	44
Figure 3.24. <i>Catalogo delle Opere Date Finora alla Luce da Gio. Battista Piranesi</i> , 1762.....	46
Figure 3.25. <i>Prospetto esterno dell' avanzo de' portici circolari del Teatro de Marcello, Antichità, IV</i> , 1756.....	47
Figure 3.26. Pierre-Jean Mariette, measured drawing from the <i>L'Architecture françoise</i> , 1727.....	47
Figure 3.27. Giambattista Nolli, detail from the <i>La nuova topografia di Roma Comasco</i> , 1748.....	49
Figure 3.28. Severan <i>Forma Urbis Romae</i> , a fragment demonstrating part of the Subura, a notorious neighbourhood of imperial Rome.....	49
Figure 3.29. Plan of Rome, <i>Antichità, I</i> , 1756	49
Figure 3.30. Plan of Rome, <i>Campo</i> , 1762.....	50
Figure 3.31. Foundations of Hadrian's Mausoleum (later Castel Sant'Angelo), <i>Antichità, IV</i> , 1756.....	51
Figure 3.32. Part of the foundations of the theatre of Marcellus, <i>Antichità, IV</i> , 1756	51
Figure 3.33. <i>Ichnographiam Campi Martii Antiquae Urbis, Campo</i> , 1762.....	52
Figure 3.34. Plate VII (<i>Lapide del primo frontespizio</i>) on the left, and facing page on the right, <i>Lettere di giustificazione scritte a milord Charlemont</i> , first edition, 1757.....	53

Figure 3.35. View and sectional detail of the Cloaca Maxima, <i>Della magnificenza</i> , 1761	56
Figure 3.36. Roman and Greek Ionic capitals, <i>Le Roy's words</i> and <i>The Mouth of Truth</i> , <i>Della magnificenza</i> , 1761	56
Figure 3.37. Title page (inserted frame depicts Mariette's hand), <i>Osservazioni</i> , 1765	58
Figure 3.38. <i>Dimostrazione dell' Emissario del Lago Albano</i> , <i>Emissario</i> , 1762	60
Figure 3.39. <i>Veduta laterale dello stesso Sepolcro</i> , <i>Antichità d'Albano</i> , 1764	60
Figure 3.40. <i>Prospettiva della scala della stessa conserva d'acqua</i> , <i>Antichità d'Albano</i> , 1764.....	61
Figure 3.41. <i>Ordine Toscano del Tempio di Giove Laziale</i> , <i>Antichità d'Albano</i> , 1764	61
Figure 3.42. <i>Disegno degli avanzi d'un'antica piscina e delle conserve dell'acqua della medesima, piantate su le rovine d'Alba Lunga, or sopra Castel Gandolfo di là dal Convento de' PP. Riformati di San Francesco</i> , <i>Antichità d'Albano</i> , 1764	62
Figure 3.43. <i>Dimostrazione in grande del criptoportico accennato nella tav. 9 con la lettera C</i> , <i>Spelonche</i> , 1764.....	62
Figure 3.44. Preliminary study for a longitudinal section from the apse of San Giovanni in Laterano, Plate III, 1765, The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, 1966.11:56.....	63
Figure 3.45. Sketch study for the altar of <i>The Apotheosis of St Basil of Cappadocia</i> in Santa Maria del Priorato, Kunstbibliothek, Berlin, Hdz 6331	64
Figure 3.46. <i>Fides</i> (faith, the goddess of loyalty), Berlin, Kunstbibliothek.....	65
Figure 3.47. <i>Religion</i> , Berlin, Kunstbibliothek	66
Figure 3.48. <i>Fides</i> (faith, the goddess of loyalty), Berlin, Kunstbibliothek.....	66
Figure 3.49. Preliminary design for the screen wall of Santa Maria del Priorato's piazza (framed part refers to the chimneypiece from the <i>Diverse maniere</i>), Kunstbibliothek, Berlin, Hdz 6303	66
Figure 3.50. Plate 34, <i>Diverse maniere</i> , 1769	67
Figure 3.51. View from the entrance façade of the Santa Maria del Priorato, Rome, 1764-66, photography Roberto Bossaglia.....	68

Figure 3.52. Carlo Marchionni, <i>Tempietto Greco</i> , Villa Albani, Rome, 1760, photography Alinari/Art Resource, NY.....	69
Figure 3.53. Painted scheme in the Egyptian taste for the Caffé degli Inglesi, Rome (shorter wall), <i>Diverse maniere</i> , 1769 (executed in 1760).....	70
Figure 3.54. Painted scheme in the Egyptian taste for the Caffé degli Inglesi, Rome (longer wall), <i>Diverse maniere</i> , 1769 (executed in 1760).....	71
Figure 3.55. Funerary monument of Augustus Urbanus with boar's head rhyton, <i>Vasi</i> , 1778	72
Figure 3.56. Drawing for Newdigate candelabrum, <i>Vasi</i> , 1778.....	72
Figure 3.57. The Warwick Vase, <i>Vasi</i> , 1778	73
Figure 4.1. Chimneypiece in Egyptian manner, Plate XXIV, <i>Diverse maniere</i> , 1769	75
Figure 4.2. Plate XIV, <i>Invenzioni capricci di carceri</i> , 1745.....	75
Figure 4.3. <i>Pianta della forma del Castro di Tiberio, ecc.</i> , <i>Antichità</i> , I, 1756/76	
Figure 4.4. Fischer von Erlach, plate showing tombs at Heliopolis, <i>Entwurf einer historischen Architektur</i> , 1721	79
Figure 4.5. Sheet of sketches after Fischer von Erlach's <i>Entwurf einer historischen Architektur</i> , The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1966.11:17	80
Figure 4.6. Sir Banister Fletcher, "The Tree of Architecture," <i>A History of Architecture</i> , 1896	85
Figure 4.7. <i>Parte di ampio magnifico porto</i> , <i>Opere varie</i> , 1750.....	87
Figure 5.1. Marc-Antoine Laugier, Rustic Hut, <i>Essai sur l'Architecture</i> , 1753.....	89
Figure 5.2. Detail of the <i>Acqua Felice</i> , <i>Vedute</i> , 1760	92
Figure 5.3. Chimneypiece in Etruscan manner, <i>Diverse maniere</i> , 1769.....	97
Figure 5.4. Francesco Milizia, drawing from the <i>Del Teatro</i> , 1773	98
Figure 5.5. One of flanking <i>stelae</i> on the south wall, Santa Maria del Priorato, 1764-1766, Piazzale de' Cavalieri di Malta, photography Gabinetto Fotografico Nazionale, Rome	99
Figure 5.6. Cosmography around 124 AD, Dionysius Periegetes	100
Figure 5.7. Asia - Africa distinction according to Herodotus, 450 BC, Herodotus.....	103
Figure 5.8. Isidore, T-O map, <i>Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX</i> , Vollbehr Collection, Washington, ljs184	104

Figure 5.9. Isidore's T-O map translated into English with north at the top, Isidore	104
Figure 5.10. <i>Hereford mappa mundi</i> (Hereford world map), 1290, Library of Hereford Cathedral	105
Figure 5.11. <i>Dionysii orbis descriptio</i> , cover pages, 1697.....	106
Figure 5.12. <i>Pyramid of Cestius, Varie Vedute</i> , 1750.....	107
Figure 5.13. Plate IX, <i>Invenzioni capricci di carceri</i> , 1745.....	109
Figure 5.14. Cesare Beccaria, <i>On Crimes and Punishment</i> , 1764	110
Figure 5.15. David Roberts, <i>Fragments of the Great Colossi at the Memnonium</i> , 1847, Davidson Galleries, Seattle.....	111
Figure 5.16. Plate VI, <i>Parere</i> , 1765	112
Figure 5.17. Chimney in Egyptian manner, <i>Diverse maniere</i> , 1769	113
Figure 5.18. <i>Pianta del Serraglio delle fiere fabbricato da Dominiziano per uso dell'Anfiteatro</i> , showing substructure which was buried in Piranesi's time, <i>Antichità</i> , IV, 1756.....	114
Figure 5.19. <i>Modo col quale furono alzati i grossi Travertini, e gli altri Marmi nel fabbricare il gran Sepolcro di Cecilia Metella, oggi detto Capo di Bove</i> , Plate LIII, first edition, <i>Antichità</i> , III, 1756.....	114
Figure 5.20. Visual dictionary, <i>Diverse maniere</i> , 1769	115
Figure 6.1. Plate VIII, detail, <i>Parere</i> , 1765.....	118
Figure 6.2. Plate VIII, <i>Parere</i> , 1765	118
Figure 6.3. William Kent, Temple of British Worthies, Stowe Gardens, Buckinghamshire, photography Robert Viau, 2005	124
Figure 6.4. Giuseppe Vasi, <i>Ponte Salario, Magnificenze di Roma Antica e Moderna</i> , 1754.....	125
Figure 6.5. <i>Ponte Salario, Vedute</i> , 1754	125
Figure 6.6. Marc-Antoine Laugier, Rustic Hut, detail, <i>Essai sur l'Architecture</i> , 1753	126
Figure 6.7. Perspective construction of Vasi's <i>Ponte Salario</i>	127
Figure 6.8. Perspective construction of Piranesi's <i>Ponte Salario</i>	128
Figure 6.9. Human figures in Piranesi's <i>Ponte Salario</i>	130
Figure 6.10. Human figures in Piranesi's Plate VII, The Drawbridge, <i>Carceri d'Invenzione</i> , 1760.....	130

Figure 6.11. François Philotée Duflos, Basilica of Maxentius, <i>Varie Vedute</i> , 1748	132
Figure 6.12. Etienne Dupérac, Basilica of Maxentius, <i>I Vestigi dell'Antichità di Roma</i> , 1575	132
Figure 6.13. Basilica of Maxentius, <i>Antichità</i> , 1756.....	132
Figure 6.14. Perspective construction of Duflos' Basilica of Maxentius.....	133
Figure 6.15. Perspective construction of Piranesi's Basilica of Maxentius	134
Figure 6.16. <i>Avanzo del Tempio della Concordia</i> , <i>Antichità</i> , I, 1756.....	135
Figure 6.17. Title page, <i>Invenzioni capricci di carceri</i> , 1745	136
Figure 6.18. Plate II, <i>Carceri d'Invenzione</i> , 1760.....	136
Figure 6.19. Frontispiece II, oblique perspective from <i>Ichnographia</i> , detail, <i>Campo</i> , 1762	137

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
Table 2.1. Abrams' construction demonstrating the co-ordinates of art criticism.....	14

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Antichità</i>	Piranesi <i>Le antichità romane</i>
<i>Antichità d'Albano</i>	Piranesi <i>Antichità d'Albano e di Castel Gandolfo Descritte ed incise da Giovambattista Piranesi</i>
<i>Architettura civile</i>	Bibiena <i>Architettura civile preparata su la Geometri</i>
<i>Belle arti</i>	Piranesi <i>Della introduzione e del progresso delle belle arti in Europa ne' tempi antichi</i>
<i>Campo</i>	Piranesi <i>Il Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma</i>
<i>Carceri</i>	Piranesi <i>Invenzioni capricci di carceri and Carceri d'invenzione</i>
<i>Collegio</i>	Piranesi <i>Pianta di ampio magnifico collegio</i>
<i>Concordia</i>	Piranesi <i>Avonzo del Tempio della Concordia</i>
<i>De arch.</i>	Vitruvius <i>De architectura libri decem</i>
<i>Della magnificenza</i>	Piranesi <i>Della magnificenza ed architettura de'romani</i>
<i>Diverse maniere</i>	Piranesi <i>Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini ed ogni altra parte degli edifizii desunte dall'architettura egizia, etrusca, e greca, con un ragionamento apologetico in difesa dell'architettura egizia, e Toscana</i>
<i>Emissario</i>	Piranesi <i>Descrizione e disegno dell'emissario del Lago Albano di Gio. Battista Piranesi</i>
<i>Essai</i>	Laugier <i>Essai sur l'Architecture</i>
<i>Apologetical Essay</i>	Piranesi, "An Apologetical Essay in Defense of the Egyptian and Tuscan Architecture"
<i>Gedanken</i>	Winckelmann <i>Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bildhauer-Kunst</i>
<i>Geometria</i>	Orsini <i>Della geometria e prospettiva pratica</i>
<i>Ichnographia</i>	Piranesi <i>Ichnographiam Campi Martii Antiquae Urbis</i>
<i>Inquiry</i>	Burke <i>A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful</i>
<i>Laterano</i>	Piranesi <i>San Giovanni in Laterano</i>

<i>Le scene</i>	Orsini <i>Le scene del nuovo Teatro del Verzaro di Perugia</i>
<i>Lettere</i>	Piranesi <i>Lettere di giustificazione scritte a Milord Charlemont e al di lui Agenti di Roma</i>
<i>Observations</i>	Kant <i>Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and Sublime</i>
<i>On sub.</i>	Longinus <i>Peri hypsous</i>
<i>Opere varie</i>	Piranesi <i>Opere varie di architettura</i>
<i>Osservazioni</i>	Piranesi <i>Osservazioni sopra la lettre de Monsieur Mariette</i>
<i>Paestum</i>	Piranesi <i>Varie Vedute di Paestum</i>
<i>Parere</i>	Piranesi <i>Parere su l'Architettura</i>
<i>Pianta del Serraglio</i>	Piranesi <i>Pianta del Serraglio delle fiere fabbricato da Dominiziano per uso dell'Anfiteatro</i>
<i>Poet.</i>	Aristotle <i>Ars poetica</i>
<i>Porto</i>	Piranesi <i>Parte di ampio magnifico porto</i>
<i>Prima Parte</i>	Piranesi <i>Prima Parte di Architetture e Prospettive</i>
<i>Priorato</i>	Piranesi <i>Santa Maria del Priorato</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	Aristotle <i>Ars rhetorica</i>
<i>Ruines</i>	Le Roy <i>Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce</i>
<i>Spelonche</i>	Piranesi <i>Di due Spelonche Ornate Dagli Antichi alla Riva del Lago Albano</i>
<i>Varie Vedute</i>	Piranesi <i>Varie Vedute di Roma Antica e Moderna</i>
<i>Vasi</i>	Piranesi <i>Vasi, Candelabri, Cippi, Sarcofagi, Tripodi, Lucerne ed Ornamenti Antichi Disegn</i>
<i>Vedute</i>	Piranesi <i>Vedute di Roma</i>

LIST OF TITLES OF PIRANESI'S PRINTED WORKS FREQUENTLY USED IN THIS THESIS, AND THEIR TRANSLATIONS

Below is a chronological list of Piranesi's works, including drawings (drawing series), texts, architectural projects, and executed projects. Certainly, Piranesi's work presents difficulties in even this simple mode of classification, since a given work may easily be taken as, say, a drawing series as well as architectural project. In such cases, the alternatives were simultaneously indicated through the 'alternative' sign (/).

1. 1743 *Prima Parte di Architetture e Prospettive inventate ed incise da Gio. Batta. Piranesi Architetto Veneziano dedicate al Sig. Nicola Giobbe*

Part one of architecture and perspectives invented and etched by Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Venetian Architect, dedicated to Sig. Nicola Giobbe

drawing series
2. 1745 *Grotteschi drawings*
3. 1745 *Invenzioni capricci di carceri all'acqua forte datte il luce da Giovanni Buzard in Roma mercante al Corso*

Capricious inventions of prisons

drawing series
4. 1745 *Varie Vedute di Roma Antica e Moderna incise da Celebri Autori a Spese di Fausto Amidei*

Diverse Views of Ancient and Modern Rome etched by Celebrated Artists at the Expense of Fausto Amidei

drawing series
5. 1748 *Alcune Vedute di Archi Trionfali ed altri monumenti inalzati da Romani parte de quali se veggono in Roma e parte per l'Italia, ed Incisi dal Cavalier Gio. Battista Piranesi*

Some Views of Triumphal Archs and other monuments

drawing series

- 6. 1748** *Antichità romane de' tempi della repubblica e de' primi imperatori, disegnate ed incise da Giambattista Piranesi*
- Roman Antiquities of the time of the republic and the beginnings of the empire, designed and etched by Giambattista Piranesi
- drawing series**
- 6. 1748-78** *Vedute di Roma*
- Views of Rome
- drawing series**
- 7. 1750** *Opere varie di architettura prospettive, grotteschi, antichità; inventate, ed incise da Giambattista Piranesi Architetto Veneziano*
- Miscellaneous works in architectural perspectives, grotesques, antiquities; invented and etched by Giambattista Piranesi, Venetian Architect
- drawing series**
- 8. 1752** *Raccolta di Varie Vedute di Roma si Anticha che Moderna Intagliate la Maggior Parte dal Celebre*
- Collection of Various Views of Rome Antique and Modern Carved for the Most Part by Celebrities
- drawing series**
- 9. 1753** *Trofei di Ottaviano Augusto Innalzati per la Vittoria ad Actium e Conquista dell'Egitto on vari altri ornamenti diligentemente ricavati dagli avanzi piu' preziosi delle fabbriche antiche di Roma, utili a pittori, scultori ed architetti, designati ed incisi da Giambattista Piranesi, Architetto Veneziano*
- Trophies of Octavian Augustus
- drawing series**
- 10. 1756** *Le antichità romane*
- Roman antiquities
- text and drawing series**
- 11. 1757** *Lettere di giustificazione scritte a Milord Charlemont e al di lui Agenti di Roma dal Signor Piranesi socio della real societa' degli antiquari di*

Londra intorno alla dedica della sua opera delle Antichita' Rom. fatta allo stesso signor ed ultimamente soppressa

Letters of justification written to Lord Charlemont and you the Agents of Rome

text and drawings series

12. 1760 *Carceri d'Invenzione*

Prisons of the Invention

drawing series

13. 1760s *Caffé degli Inglesi in Piazza di Spagna*

The English Coffee House

executed architectural project

14. 1761 *Della magnificenza ed architettura de'romani opera di Gio Battista Piranesi socio della reale accademia degli antiquari di Londra*

On the magnificence and architecture of Romans

text and drawing series

15. 1761 *Le Rovine del Castello dell'Acqua Giulia Situato in Roma Presso S. Eusebio e Falsamente detto dell'Acqua Marcia Colla Dicharazione di uno de'Celebre Passi del Comentario Frontiniano e Sposizione della Maniera con cui gli Antichi Romani Distribuiuan le Acque per uso della Citta*

Ruins of the castellum of the Acqua Iulia

drawing series

16. 1762 *Descrizione e disegno dell'emissario del Lago Albano di Gio. Battista Piranesi*

Description and design of the emissarium of Lago Albano

drawing series

17. 1762 *I. B. Piranesii Lapides Capitolini, Sive, Fasti Consulares Triumphalesq(ue) Romanorum ab Urbe Condita usque ad Tiberium Caesarem*

text and drawing series

- 18. 1762** *Il Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma, Opera di G. B. Piranesi socio della real societa' degli antiquari di Londra*
- The Campus Martius of ancient Rome
- drawing series**
- 19. 1764** *Antichità d'Albano e di Castel Gandolfo Descritte ed incise da Giovambattista Piranesi*
- text and drawing series**
- 20. 1764** *Antichità di Cora, Descritte ed Incise da Giovambattista Piranesi*
- text and drawing series**
- 21. 1764** *Di due Spelonche Ornate Dagli Antichi alla Riva del Lago Albano*
- text and drawing series**
- 22. 1764** *Raccolta di alcuni disegni del Barbieri da Cento detto il Guercino incisi in rame , e presentati al singolar merito del Sig. Tommaso Jenkins pittore, ed accademico di S. Luca, in atto di rispetto e d'amicizia dall'architetto e suo coaccademico: Gio Battista Piranesi*
- drawing series**
- 23. 1764** San Giovanni in Laterano comprising west-end-design
- architectural project**
- 24. 1764-66** Santa Maria del Priorato and its piazza
- executed architectural project**
- 25. 1765** Three essays published under the title of *Parere su l'architettura*:
1. *Osservazioni sopra la lettre de Monsieur Mariette*
- Observations on the letter of Monsieur Mariette
- text and drawing series**
2. *Parere su l'architettura*
- Opinions on architecture
- text and drawing series**
3. *Della introduzione e del progresso delle belle arti in Europa*

ne' tempi antichi

On the introduction and progress of the fine arts in Europe in ancient times

text and drawing series

26. 1769 *Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini ed ogni altra parte degli edifizii*

Diverse manners of ornamenting chimneys and all other parts of the buildings

text and drawing series / architectural projects some of which were executed

27. 1774 *Pianta di Roma e del Campo Marzio*

Plans of Rome and the Campo Marzio

text and a single drawing

28. 1774 *Trofeo o sia Magnifica Colonna Coclide di marmo composta di grossi macigni ove si veggono scolpite le due guerre daciche fatte da Traiano inalzata nel mezzo del gran Foro eretto al medesimo imperatore per ordine del Senato e Popolo Romano doppo i suoi trionfi*

drawing series

29. 1778 *Différentes vues de quelques restes de trors grandes edifices qui subsistent encore dans le milieu de l'ancienne ville de Pesto Varie [Vedute di Paestum]*

Different Views of Paestum

drawing series

30. 1778 *Vasi, Candelabri, Cippi, Sarcofagi, Tripodi, Lucerne ed Ornamenti Antichi Disegn*

Vases, Candelabra, Low Pillars, Sarcophagi, Tripods, Lanterns and Antique Design Ornaments

drawing series

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this thesis is to render an extensive interpretation of the work of the eighteenth-century Italian architect, architectural historian, archaeologist and scholar Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778). While Piranesi, as befits his immense output, has been studied very elaborately, one may equally claim that he has been under-studied since most of the work done on him, especially in the English language, comprises misinterpretation of a remarkable *oeuvre*. Thus at the same time that this thesis offers its positive arguments about Piranesi, it also aims at explaining the nature of the misinterpretation. The vectors of approach that yield misinterpretation of Piranesi essentially derive from two phenomena that were, roughly speaking, the products of the nineteenth century which were quietly, imperceptibly blended into Piranesi studies of the twentieth century. One is the early nineteenth-century Romanticist mode of reception and transmission of Piranesi's character and work. The second is the codification of architectural history as it was concluded by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As the chapters below demonstrate, both of these have served to relegate Piranesi to a domain where he has been identified with eccentricity that has made him appear unclassifiable. He has thus been excluded from the 'story' of the progress of the western history of architecture variously as too "eclectic" to belong to a specific stylistic school or period or as "utopic" in the way the "avant-garde" may become utopic. More precisely he has been described as representative of a "utopia of subjective negation" possible "only in the ivory-tower land of the avant-garde."¹

Piranesi is indeed unclassifiable, but he is so in the way radical innovators tend to be unclassifiable in terms of the very categories which their innovation will eventually have generated. Piranesi lived and worked at that moment in history that saw the rise of disciplines which are inseparable ground of our discourse today: architectural history and archaeology. He was immensely instrumental in the creation and invention of these two fields. While all Piranesi critics acknowledge this architect's enormous creativity, there are only a very few who recognize his originary contribution to the

¹ Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and Labyrinth: Avant-gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970's* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1978), p. 34.

constitution of these fields. Thus while this thesis aims at demonstrating Piranesi's contribution to the disciplines of an architectural archaeology and the historiography of architecture, it necessarily also demonstrates the reasons for the erroneous reception of his work.

Piranesi was an architect, and the argument of this thesis by no means implies that despite this essential orientation Piranesi in time changed his direction. The archaeology that had developed until his day was predominantly a philologically oriented antiquarianism and Piranesi aimed at placing it upon architectural ground. Similarly, his approach to the historiography of architecture derived from research into building materials and construction techniques. The major spokesman of the competing view of architectural history that was developing in Piranesi's lifetime was Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768). Contrary to Piranesi's architecturally oriented view of architectural history, Winckelmann's, which eventually became the dominant view in currency even today, comprised an aesthetically oriented stylistic approach.

In the framework of Piranesi, the history and archaeology of architecture were inseparable. We must remember that many of the archaeological sites familiar to us today, even those in Italy and in Rome, had been either recently uncovered or were being uncovered in Piranesi's lifetime, with Piranesi participating in the excavations. Somewhat remoter in space, the pyramids—which, along with the rest of Egyptian architecture, so interested Piranesi—were not going to be explored until the end of the century, the time of the Napoleonic campaign into Egypt. Piranesi wrote his views in textual form. Intensely bent on driving his argument throughout Europe, he wrote a lot of his texts simultaneously in the three languages of English, French, and Italian. He was a gifted writer, sharp polemicist, and exceedingly well read in classics and moderns. Though this statement in no way is meant to detract from the persuasiveness of his written argument, Piranesi mounted his fundamental arguments in elaborate series of drawings. Piranesi's architectural drawings and etchings are the most trenchant instruments for his arguments. In fact, recent criticism has begun to recognize in them an innovative direction pointing at the future of architectural drawing.

Piranesi had arguments about architecture which had not been spoken, written or drawn before. He, for example, conjectured to draw parts of ancient buildings that were still not excavated and remained underground. In order to show the historical layers of stylistic and constructional derivation or to draw the co-presence of archaic, ancient, medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, etc. layers in a given *vista*, he had need for a mode of

drawing with multiple planary orders and vanishing points, for which the extant classical-Albertian mode of architectural drawing did not provide room. Even today, his manner of drawing is deemed fantastic, utopic, idiosyncratic or eclectic at best by even architectural historians as prominent as Joseph Rykwert, Manfredo Tafuri, and John Wilton-Ely. At worst, he is deemed “mad,” “frenzied,” “megalomaniac,” “bizarre,” and “depressive.” This thesis rejects all of these characterizations to demonstrate that, in order to extricate architectural drawing from the constraints of the classical paradigm and devise a novel manner, Piranesi resorted to widely used modes of representation available in his culture. Most prominent among these were the genre of drawing (and painting) named the *capriccio*; Venetian stage design that had reached post-Baroque sophistication in his time; and the philosophy of the sublime. The latter was being elaborated by thinkers as significant as Edmund Burke (1729-1797) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and drew its illustrations mostly from architecture. The philosophy of the sublime, which generated this aesthetic category in contradistinction to the classical ‘beautiful’, functioned to demonstrate the difference of the new kind of thing Piranesi was after. Similarly the *capriccio* enabled him to bring together the empirically real (the extant artefact above ground) and the non-existent (the un-excavated archaeological underground). Venetian stage design again enabled the depiction of yet-unexcavated archaeological space as well as the multiplanar layering of the representation of history. All of them together enabled the drawing of architectural projects that might no longer constitute the *imitatio* of the ancients. But the important point is that Piranesi was not an unclassifiable eccentric. He found all his means in his immediate environment.

Methodologically, this thesis required archival research on original materials and books printed during and before Piranesi’s time. Equally, it required access to secondary literature published in rare or older periodicals and books. These were made largely possible by a grant from the Institute’s Research Fund, which enabled ordering of archival and old materials as microfilm print and, wherever permissible, as photocopy. Thus, determining the most fertile collections in the world that contain materials by and about Piranesi was the initial phase in research. Near-exhaustive lists of primary and secondary material available in the British Library, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Avery Fisher Architectural and Fine Arts Library of Columbia University, the Cambridge University Libraries, the University of Chicago Library, and Oxford University Libraries were compiled as a first step.

This process included identification of visual and textual works by Piranesi. Textual materials proved relatively easier to identify than drawings as the number of Piranesi's drawings were, in 1902, surmised to be around two thousand.² Thus it was decided to limit thesis research to the study of those drawing and textual materials that were published by Piranesi in his own lifetime. Upon this basis, reproductions of original publications and, where extant, modern editions of those original publications were obtained in microfilm print. Regarding secondary literature, one tried to obtain as much material as time and funds permitted. The secondary material obtained and studied is indicated in the discussion below and in the bibliography of secondary sources at the end of the thesis. The primary material obtained too is exhaustively discussed in the thesis. In preparing the bibliography, however, of primary sources at the end of the thesis, exhaustiveness has been placed before availability. Preparation of this bibliography was necessary in order to determine an order list, and given that no exhaustive primary bibliography on Piranesi is available in print, this bibliography has been included in the thesis as a contribution to Piranesi studies today.

Given the scope and time-limits of a master thesis and the difficulties involved in long-distance archival research, original manuscripts and drawings were not consulted. To the extent possible, material studied included visual and textual work by Piranesi's contemporaries and predecessors.

The approach of the thesis is historical in the sense that it aims at understanding Piranesi's project in his own environment. This aim naturally involves two directions of historical research: the first is to work one's way through the layers of interpretation spanning Piranesi's after-culture and the present, and thereby understanding—to the extent possible—the layers of mediation shaping our reading of Piranesi. The second is to trace Piranesi's itinerary so as to identify his engagements, contacts, what he read and what he knew, in order to be able to re-construct the context in which he produced.

Thus the first chapter below, entitled "Why Is Piranesi Misinterpreted: *Le style c'est l'homme même*," addresses one of the vectors of present-day misreadings of Piranesi and identifies it as the historical construction of a certain kind of psychological character for Piranesi through which, then, the work is interpreted. The root of this

² The number of Piranesi's drawings are surmised to be about two thousand and to comprise twenty-nine folio volumes. See W. J. Woodworth, "Piranesi: The Rembrandt of Architecture," *Brush and Pencil* 10:5 (August 1902): 277. Many more drawings have emerged, however, since Woodworth took count in 1902.

identification of man-and-work is located in the seminal statement by a contemporary of Piranesi's: Georges-Louis Leclerc's (1707-1788) proverbial *Le style c'est l'homme même* (the style is the man himself). Though famous for this statement, Leclerc nevertheless was not original: he was drawing on a deeply entrenched belief in western culture that can be traced back to Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC) and shown to have remained continuous throughout history, through Leclerc, up to our day.

Leclerc's conception identifying ethos and style was applied to Piranesi already in his own lifetime, as the first section of the chapter demonstrates. But Leclerc's statement did not necessarily carry negative implications. In Piranesi's lifetime, it mostly served the recognition of the higher order of his creativity and contribution. The placement of Piranesi's work and character on the darker side of the human arose with the Romanticist period that marked the aftermath of the French Revolution. The second part of the chapter lays out the breadth of the Romanticist reception of Piranesi's work and delineates the casting of the architect as sinister "Byronic Hero" and the architect's contribution to creation of the space of the Gothic novel, both of which, to the Romantics, bore positive implications. It traces the transformation of this positive *poetic* perception of Piranesi into a rigidified apprehension of him by *architectural* historians of our day in a negative approach.

Since what is at stake in this misconception is found to be a slanted view of Piranesi's life and person and since there have been no biographies written of Piranesi since his own century, it became necessary to compose Piranesi's life, which Chapter 3 takes up. This chapter, called "Architectural Biography of Piranesi," proceeds in the order of Piranesi's practical and written or drawn work as well as aiming at tracing his professional contacts and engagements.

Chapter 4, "Why Is Piranesi Misinterpreted: Fletcher's *Tree of Architecture*," addresses the second component in the present-day misinterpretation of Piranesi's work. On the basis of the biographically drawn itinerary of his work in Chapter 3, the first part of Chapter 4 pulls together the strands of architectural, archaeological, and theoretical work conducted by Piranesi in order to map out his conception of architectural history. Piranesi claimed that Roman architecture derived not from the Greek, but from the Etruscan, which, according to him, derived from Egypt. The second part of the chapter looks at the codification of architectural history in the nineteenth century, most prominently evinced in Sir Banister Fletcher's (1866-1953) *A History of Architecture* (1896), and traces to that codification the exclusion of Piranesi from the standardized

progress of architectural history in the west and his identification by ‘idiosyncrasy’. Conflated with the Romanticist mediation of the dark madman, the view of idiosyncrasy is demonstrated to have generated interpretations of Piranesi which few today attempt to question. One example is the interpretation of Piranesi’s stance as Orientalist by contemporary scholars following Edward Said. Winckelmann’s approach rooting the origin of Roman architecture in the Greek came to dominate the standard history of architecture in contrast to Piranesi’s. Thus, with the vogue created by Said, it became rather easy to interpret Piranesi’s drawings, filled with Egyptian motifs, as “Orientalist.”

Chapter 5, concerning, “Asia, Europe, Africa and History of Styles in the Eighteenth Century” proceeds to describe and discuss the debate that resonated throughout eighteenth-century Europe and concerned the historical origins of European architecture. Numerous important eighteenth-century works were produced in the context of the emergence of the discipline of architectural history. In this architectural, historical, and archaeological framework, Piranesi played an important role by his visual and literary works as well as original approach to history. He developed a history of architecture that was not based on the East/West division and the separation of the continents. In opposition to writers like Winckelmann who rooted the origin of Roman architecture in the Greek, he claimed that Roman architecture derived from the Etruscan which found its roots in Egypt. Discussion of roots depended in the eighteenth century on aesthetical theory interpreting Grecian architecture as ‘beautiful’ and Roman—and thus Egyptian—as ‘sublime’. Piranesi was spokesman of the latter argument. The chapter demonstrates the presence, in Piranesi’s culture, of a vision of a unified world made up of the three old continents, which enabled Piranesi to envision transitions between Egypt and Italy. The chapter conducts the demonstration cartographically, from ancient times to Piranesi.

Chapter 6, “Piranesi Between Classical and Sublime,” reflects on Piranesi’s relationship to the philosophy of the ‘sublime’ as elaborated in Burke’s *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and Kant’s *Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764). The eighteenth-century debate on the relationship and difference between the ‘beautiful’ and the ‘sublime’ in fact was accelerated by the emergence of aesthetic philosophy, which both drew on and influenced the disciplines of architecture and architectural history. Aesthetic debates merged with the debate on origins. Since the Grecian manner had traditionally been taken as representing the ‘beautiful’, the philosophy of the ‘sublime’

offered Piranesi space for inserting his view of architectural history, differentiating a stylistic and building vector that cut from Egypt to Italy. The demonstration takes on the form of Piranesi's re-working of his contemporaries' drawings of the 'beautiful', converting them to the 'sublime'. The chapter weaves together the diverse strands of the *capriccio* drawing and the philosophy of the sublime in order to trace how Piranesi drew on two such diverse contemporary phenomena to articulate a vision of architectural archaeology and history which had no precedent.

Piranesi seemed firmly to believe that both his thought and work would persist in posterity. He gained widespread acceptance, even posthumously generating or contributing to movements of and taste for such phenomena as "Egyptomania,"³ Gothic revivalism, and eclecticism, about neither of which he probably would have been too enthusiastic. Around the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth, Piranesi's popularity diminished. At that point in history there was even at least one museum that did not accept a donation of his plates for lack of shelf space proper to the plates' dimensions.⁴ There arose a revival of interest, though, in the wake of Dada, Surrealism, and Futurism.⁵ These, however, drew on the Romantics' dark Piranesi, a Piranesi that could be employed to shock bourgeois sensibility and speak against the reality principle in the name of the unconscious. It was in this psycho-political framework too, that studies on Piranesi flourished in the aftermath of World War II. In Aldous Huxley, in 1949, Piranesi became the paradoxical commentator on incarceration, both harbinger and critic of the Brave New World.⁶ Even in the hands of architectural historians, this Piranesi, like Huxley's Piranesi, was still De Quincey's and Coleridge's fellow "Opium-Eater."

This thesis aims at restoring Piranesi to architectural history.

³ Rudolf Wittkower, "Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania," *Studies in the Italian Baroque* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), pp. 259-73; see especially p. 272.

⁴ Philip Hofer, "Piranesi as Book Illustrator," *Piranesi*, exhibition catalogue, Smith College Museum of Art, 4 April-4 May 1959 (Northampton, Mass.: Smith College Museum of Art, 1961), p. 87.

⁵ On the interpretation of Piranesi as the first modern architect and a reference point for Surrealism, see Jennifer Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text: The Scripts of Joyce and Piranesi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 4. For similar interpretations, see Peter Proudfoot, "Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Neo-Classicism and the Rise of the Free-style in Architecture," *Architecture Australia* 74: 3 (1985): 74.

⁶ Aldous Huxley, *Prisons, with the 'Carceri' Etchings by G. B. Piranesi* (London: Trianon Press, 1949), p. 21. Also see Huxley, *The Brave New World* (New York: Harper Collins, 1932; 1999).

CHAPTER 2

WHY IS PIRANESI MISINTERPRETED: *LE STYLE C'EST L'HOMME MEME*

2.1. Identifying Man and Work

Already the heading of this chapter indicates that this thesis largely disagrees with current interpretations of Piranesi's work. Contemporary scholarship has taken Piranesi's work as representing a style of architecture described as "obscure," "excessive," "irrational," and the like. The work is further perceived as "exaggerated," "extravagant," "paradoxical," "absurd," "hermetic," "frenetic," or "ludicrous."¹ This chapter demonstrates that such observations derive not from an investigation of the work itself, nor from an appraisal of the historical context, but owe to the long-standing view in western culture that identifies the creator's ethos with the work and interprets the work so as to cohere with that pre-constructed ethos. In fact, the pervasive description of Piranesi's work as cited above goes hand in hand with the description of the biographical character as "obscure" and "perverse."² "Obsessive," "chaotic," "absurd," and "frenetic" are other familiar adjectives that have been found fit to describe Piranesi's character,³ as has been the diagnosis of "suicidal mania."⁴ For

¹ For the evaluation of "obscure," "extravagant," and "excessive," see Joseph Rykwert, *The First Moderns: The Architects of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1980), pp. 364, 370; for "excessive," "paradoxical," "absurd," "hermetic," and "irrational," see Tafuri, *Sphere and Labyrinth*, p. 27 *et passim.*; for "frenetic," "ludicrous," "extravagant," see Nicholas Penny, *Piranesi* (London: Oresko Books; New York: Hippocrene Books, 1978), pp. 7, 10, 30; for "frenetic," "extravagant," see John Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer* (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 12, 18; for similar evaluations by Wilton-Ely in his introduction to the volume, see his edition of Piranesi's *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette: With Opinions on Architecture, and a Preface to a New Treatise on the Introduction and Progress of the Fine Arts in Europe in Ancient Times*, introduction John Wilton-Ely (Los Angeles and California: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art & the Humanities, 2002), pp. 16, 27.

² For this evaluation of Piranesi's character, see Tafuri, *Sphere and Labyrinth*, pp. 41, 47; Rykwert, *First Moderns*, p. 389; Penny, *Piranesi*, pp. 29, 80.

³ For the description of Piranesi's character as "obsessive," "chaotic," and "absurd," see Tafuri, *Sphere and Labyrinth*, pp. 36, 49; for "obsessive," see Rykwert, *First Moderns*, p. 370; for "frenetic," see Penny, *Piranesi*, p. 30, and Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, p. 12.

⁴ Paul F. Jamieson, "Musset, De Quincey, and Piranesi," *Modern Language Notes* (1956): 106.

Piranesi's *Vasi, Candelabri, Cippi, Sarcofagi, Tripodi, Lucerne ed Ornamenti Antichi Disegn* (1778), a work depicting Piranesi's designs of objects including vases and candelabri,⁵ "it is all done with obsessional, with almost morbid precision," claims Rykwert, "the morbidity is characteristic, since the whole of Piranesi's overwhelming output is the celebration of his necrophiliac passion for the glory of ancient Rome."⁶ Tafuri agrees, presenting Piranesi as a "'wicked architect', who, in the monstrousness of his contaminations, reveals the cracks guiltily repressed by a deviant rigor."⁷

These are astounding words as far as descriptive terms go where architectural historians as eminent as Rykwert and Tafuri are concerned. Far from any architectural or design consideration, unabashedly they target a psychological being. Contemporary Piranesi criticism participates in an understanding which we may summarize by Leclerc's proverbial *Le style c'est l'homme même*: the style is the man himself. Leclerc's identification dates to 1753, which makes him Piranesi's contemporary.⁸ Despite the fact that we shall argue that there is a direct line between Tafuri and Rykwert's assessment and Leclerc's statement, Leclerc had not necessarily meant the remark in a negative sense. Piranesi, however, may very well have been the first whose work was evaluated by Leclerc's statement, already in his own lifetime, and, as we are going to see, with negative effect in the long-run.

When we trace the conception identifying ethos and style, we find that it has ancient roots. Already rhetorical philosophers such as Aristotle and Longinus (first century AD), identified style and the creator's (orator's or writer's) character and described style as the direct expression of the psycho-ethical nature of the 'man'. While speaking of propriety (decorum), with the intention of determining that 'the style reflects the man himself', "Words are like men," wrote Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*⁹ and, as James A. Coulter has argued, proceeded to map out the ways in which linguistic and

⁵ Piranesi, *Vasi, Candelabri, Cippi, Sarcofagi, Tripodi, Lucerne ed Ornamenti Antichi Disegn, ed inc. dal Cav* (Rome: n.p., 1778; Paris: n.p., 1836).

⁶ Rykwert, *First Moderns*, p. 370.

⁷ Tafuri, *Sphere and Labyrinth*, p. 47.

⁸ Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, first pronounced the statement in his *Discours sur Le Style. Discours Prononcé a l'Académie Française par M. De Buffon Le Jour de sa Réception Le 25 Août 1753* (Paris: Librairie Ch. Poussielgue, 1896; J. Lecoffre, 1872), p. 23.

⁹ Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, trans. J. H. Freese (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1994), 1404b 8-12. References to this work will be henceforward indicated in parentheses in the text.

human ethos were analogous.¹⁰ According to Coulter, Aristotle's phrase of "Words are like men" implied that the canons of behavioral propriety were applicable to compositional style: the style of a man was his dress (1405a 10-14). Similarly in the *Poetics*, Aristotle identified genre with author's character: "Poetry, then, was divided according to the innate ethics [of the poet]: for those who were more solemn imitated decent doings and the doings of decent persons, while those who were meaner imitated those of foul persons, at first making satires just as the others [at first] made hymns and eulogies."¹¹ "When tragedy and comedy appeared, those incited [by these kinds] were drawn according to their innate nature toward one or the other [of the kinds] of poetry. Some became makers of comedies instead of lampoons, others of tragedies instead of epics" (1449a).¹² Aristotle explicitly found that a creator chose genre and style according to his innate character. Aristotle's identification proved seminal. As we are going to see, the depictions of Piranesi in his own lifetime attributed a lofty character to him in conjunction with his work in the design of monumental and sublime architecture. Misreading the eighteenth-century code for *sublime monumentality*, later critics were going to identify it with *dark perversity*.

The view identifying the creator's ethical character with the work continued in the eighteenth century as above all Leclerc's statement evinced. In fact, the placement of Piranesi's work and character to the darker side of the human may be traced back to the modern re-emergence, with new vigor, of the classical idea around 1750. Piranesi's 1750 depiction by the Venetian Felice Polanzani (1700-1783), published in the former's *Opere varie di architettura* (1750), may be read in this context (Fig. 2.1).¹³ The facial expression is far from demure and humble. Piranesi's character stands heightened, with a broken arm as in the relics of Antiquity which the burgeoning field of archaeology was uncovering. The Antiquity here ascribed to Piranesi derives from the eighteenth-

¹⁰ James A. Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm. Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), p. 18.

¹¹ Aristotle, *The Poetics*, ed. and trans. Stephen Halliwell, in *Aristotle, The Poetics. Longinus, On the Sublime. Demetrius, On Style* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1982), 1448b. References to this work will be henceforward indicated in parentheses in the text.

¹² For the continuity of the identification of *ethos* and style from Antiquity to the eighteenth century, see Deniz Şengel, "'Poetry' and Ethics," "Emergences of Literature: Reading and History in Sidney's *Poetics*," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1996, pp. 52-104.

¹³ Piranesi, *Opere varie di architettura prospettive, grotteschi, antichità; inventate, ed incise da Giambattista Piranesi Architetto Veneziano* (Rome: n.p., 1750; Paris: n.p., 1836).

century theory of sublime architecture to which Piranesi contributed very substantially both in design and in writing. Ancientness and monumentality, a heightened stance and darkened surroundings were essential characteristics of the sublime.¹⁴ The clouds and the play of light and shadow surrounding the architect's bust, the book symbolizing his vast learning and intellectual authority signified to the eighteenth-century mind the nature of both Piranesi's character and his work. But Polanzani's portraiture of Piranesi is not negative at all. It is an example for identifying ethos with work; in this case an

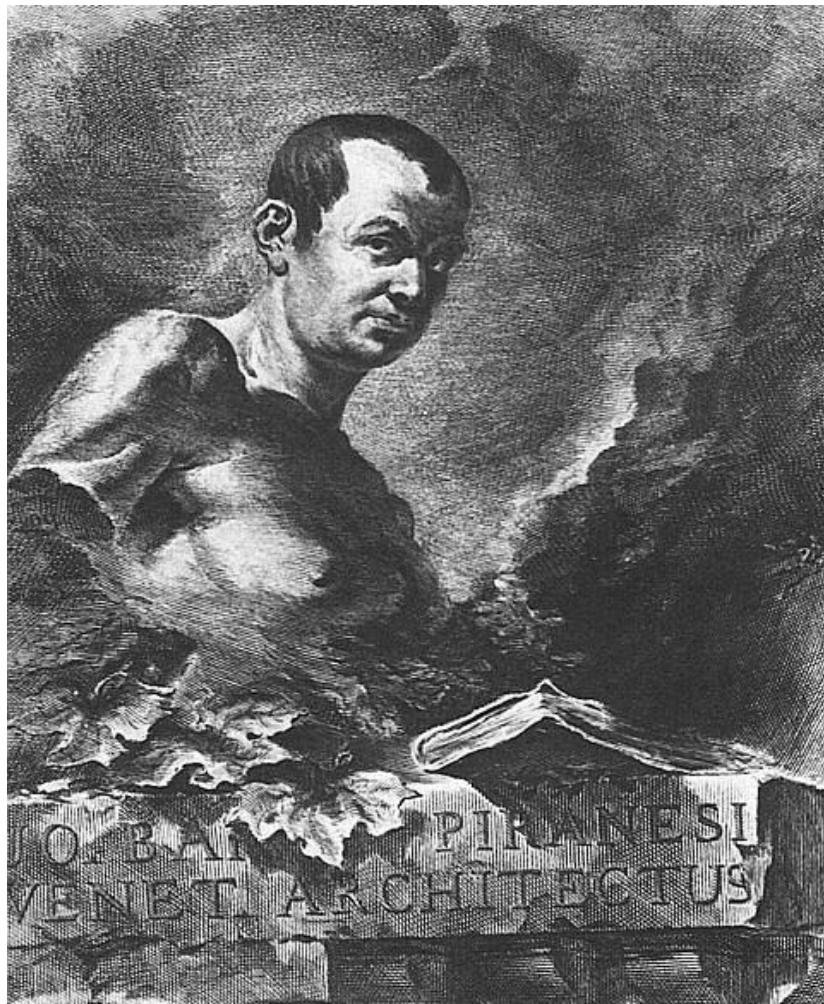


Figure 2.1. Felice Polanzani, portrait of Piranesi, *Opere varie*, 1750

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. Frank John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1960), pp. 47-50; Edmund Burke, *On Taste, A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful with several other Additions, Reflections on the French Revolution, A letter to a Noble Lord*, ed. C. W. Eliot (New York: P. F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1757; 1937), pp. 41, 45-51, 62-69, 101-102. References to these works will be henceforward indicated in parentheses in the text.

acknowledgement of Piranesi's contribution to monumental and sublime architecture as in his *Le antichità romane* (1756), *Il Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma* (1762), and the two *Carceri* series—*Invenzioni capricci di carceri* (1745) and *Carceri d'invenzione* (1760).¹⁵ Similarly, Joseph Nolleken's bust of the architect, made in the late 1760s, comprises a study in character (Fig. 2.2). Clearly in the heroic genre, this bust too, signifies the authority of the architect-intellectual and would have equally represented, to Leclerc's century, the nature of Piranesi's work as belonging to the higher genres of architecture.

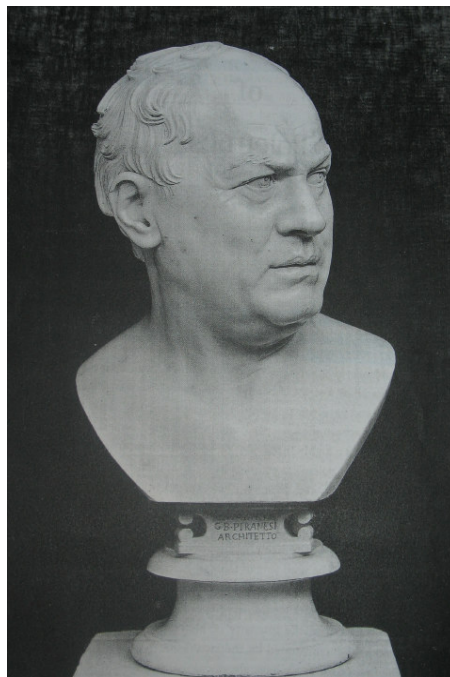


Figure 2.2. Joseph Nolleken, portrait bust of Piranesi, late 1760s

There is no proof, however, in that sculpted face full of attention, containing a keenness of vision from which nothing would escape, of "Piranesi's volatile and irascible character."¹⁶ John Wilton-Ely's reading of the bust may be said to derive from a post-Romanticist, dark ethos constructed for Piranesi. By the late 1760s, the mere fact of representation in a bust implied high seriousness and significant contribution in art

¹⁵ Piranesi, *Le antichità romane* (Rome: n.p., 1756); Piranesi, *Il Campo Marzio dell'Antica Roma* (Rome: n.p., 1762); Piranesi, *Carceri, d'Invenzione* (Rome: n.p., 1760); Piranesi, *Invenzioni capricci di carceri* (Rome: n.p., 1745). References to the *Campo* will be henceforward indicated in parentheses in the text.

¹⁶ Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, p. 35.

and science. There are very numerous examples to which one may turn. A rather explicit one is offered by William Kent (1685-1748) in his Temple of British Worthies (1734) in Stowe Gardens, Buckinghamshire (Fig. 2.3). Depicted here in bust are the financier Thomas Gresham; architect Inigo Jones; poet John Milton; poet William Shakespeare; philosopher John Locke; mathematician, physicist, astronomer, and chemist Isaac Newton; philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon; king Alfred the Great; Edward, the Black Prince; queen Elizabeth I; king William III; poet, writer, and explorer Sir Walter Raleigh; privateer, navigator, politician and civil engineer Francis Drake; politician John Hampden; author Sir John Barnard; and poet Alexander Pope: all major figures who contributed in the arts, science, state or—in one case—finance. Thus Nollegen’s bust is rather indicative of Piranesi’s artistic and scientific contribution in areas—aside from architecture *per se*—such as technical drawing,

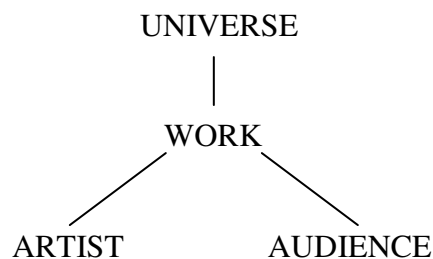


Figure 2.3. Michael Rysbrack and Peter Scheemakers, busts of British Worthies, Stowe Gardens, 1729

icnographic drawing, and particularly the measured drawing of archaeological structures—a burgeoning field in the eighteenth century.¹⁷

Instead of appraising the work by considering the creator’s character alone, not only his work, but the milieu of the spectator or reader of these works and the historical as well as wider textual context of eighteenth-century architectural thought ought to be taken into consideration. We need, in other words, a more wholistic historical approach. But the modern mainstays of western interpretations of the history of architecture remain reductive. Yet another example is the all-influential Meyer Howard Abrams who summarizes extant models in modern criticism, and in doing so becomes himself a major spokesman of reductionism.¹⁸ Abrams draws a table in which he constructs a scheme of four categories: work, artist, universe, and audience. He claims that every approach or critical method privileges one of artist, audience or universe in relation to the work, by which the work becomes transparent and a starting point for accessing artist, audience or the conception of universe. Abrams’ table demonstrating these relations is given in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Abrams’ construction demonstrating the co-ordinates of art criticism



The mode of criticism dominant in the misleading approach to Piranesi may be said to privilege the ‘artist’ category and find the man in the style of the ‘work’. But in fact it would be treating the ‘work’ like a transparent entity directly and unproblematically

¹⁷ For Piranesi’s contribution in the area of drawing, see Werner Oechslin, “Piranesi to Libeskind: Explaining by Drawing,” *Daidalos* 1 (September 1981): 15-35; Javier Girón, “Drawing and Construction Analysis: from Piranesi to Choisy,” *The Second International Congress on Construction History*, Volume 1, ed. Malcolm Dunkeld et al., Proceedings, Queens’ College, Cambridge University, 29 March-2 April 2006 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 74-76.

¹⁸ For the following account of the relations between the work-and-creator, work-and-universe (nature), and work-and-spectator, and for the construction demonstrating the co-ordinates of art criticism in Table 2.1, see Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: The Norton Library, 1958), pp. 6-8.

representing the creator. In Piranesi's case, the work has been taken like a transparent entity—like glass—through which the Piranesian vision *and* psyche are at once conveyed to the spectator (of the architectural work) and the reader (of his architectural writings).

2.2. Piranesi Fashioned as Romantic “Opium Eater”

The two *Carceri* series bear primary importance in this context because they have been accepted as transparent works particularly reflecting Piranesi's so-called darkness, obscurity and madness.¹⁹ The darker perception of Piranesi and his work most concretely goes back to Romanticism and this movement's conception of the creative character as dark and unique.²⁰ This conception made room for heightened creativity and a darker, but richer, imagination by use of intoxicating drugs, most ostensibly opium. Thus in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859) described Piranesi's work:

Many years ago, when I was looking over Piranesi's antiquities of Rome, Mr Coleridge, who was standing by, described to me a set of plates by that artist, called his *Dreams*, and which record the scenery of his visions during the delirium of a fever. Some of them [...] represented vast Gothic halls; on the floor of which stood all sorts of engines and machinery, wheels, cables, pulleys, levers, catapults, etc., etc., expressive of enormous power put forth, and resistance overcome. Creeping along the sides of the walls, you perceived a staircase; and upon it, groping his way upwards, was Piranesi himself; follow the stairs a little further, and you perceive it comes to a sudden, abrupt termination, without any balustrade, and allowing no steps onwards to him who had reached the extremity, except into the depths below. Whatever is to become of poor Piranesi?—you suppose, at least, that his labors must in some way terminate here. But raise your eyes, and behold a second flight of stairs still higher, on which again Piranesi is perceived, by this time standing on the very brink of the abyss. Again elevate your eyes, and a still more aerial flight of stairs is beheld; and again is poor Piranesi busy on his aspiring labors; and so on, until the unfinished stairs and Piranesi both are lost in the upper gloom of the hall. With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in my dreams.²¹

¹⁹ For an implication of darkness and madness in the *Carceri* see Tafuri, *Sphere and Labyrinth*, pp. 26, 32-34, 40; Wilton-Ely, *The Mind and Art of Giovanni Battista Piranesi* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), pp. 81, 89; Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, pp. 46-48.

²⁰ On the disposition for darkness in the age of Romanticism, see Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (Oxford, London, Glasgow: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 27.

²¹ Thomas de Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, ed. with introduction by Alethea Hayter (1821; London: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 105-106. For Hind's interpretation of the De Quincey passage see Arthur Mayger Hind, “Giovanni Battista Piranesi and His *Carceri*,” *Burlington Magazine* 19: 98 (May 1911): 81.

De Quincey was describing the *Carceri* plate in Fig. 2.4, and it is already interesting that Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), who apparently introduced De Quincey to the *Carceri*, referred to the work as *Dreams*.²² Coleridge himself was addicted to laudanum (opium) already in his twenties, and irreversibly so by 1800-1802,²³ which De Quincey described in “Coleridge and Opium-Eating.”²⁴



Figure 2.4. Plate VII, *Carceri d'Invenzione*, 1760

²² Hind, “Giovanni Battista Piranesi and His *Carceri*,” p. 81. For De Quincey’s interpretation of the *Carceri* as *dreams* also see Jamieson, “Musset, De Quincey, and Piranesi,” *Modern Language Notes* (1956): 105-108.

²³ James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, eds., *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Biographia Literaria* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. xlv-xlv, 17n.5.

²⁴ Thomas De Quincey, *Works*, ed. Grevel Lindop (1845; London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000), V: 179-258.

Coleridge's perception of Piranesi and the *Carceri*, and De Quincey's transmission of it to posterity proved as seminal as Aristotle's identification of ethos with style. In 1950, Huxley was going to remark that the *Carceri* represent, "metaphysical [...] guilt."²⁵ A year before, Huxley had published the *Carceri* with commentary in which he observed that,

All plates in the series are self-evidently variations on a single symbol, whose reference is to things existing in the physical and metaphysical depths of human souls – to *acedia* and confusion, to nightmare and *angst*, to incomprehension and a panic bewilderment.²⁶

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the New England moralist, who had probably seen a few prints of the *Carceri* in 1838,²⁷ wrote in his journal in 1841 that three authors had opened the gates to "new modes of existence" for him: Dante, Rabelais and Piranesi.²⁸ The connection between Piranesi and Dante is perhaps readily evident since early nineteenth-century culture would foreground the *Carceri* and identify it with Dante's *Inferno*. Emerson in fact wrote of "that infernal architecture of Piranesi."²⁹ Nor was this perception of the *Carceri* limited to the English speaking world. As Paul F. Jamieson pointed out in his 1956 article, those immensely influenced by this apprehension of Piranesi included not only the British Horace Walpole (1717-1797) and William Beckford (1760-1844) in addition to Coleridge, De Quincey and Huxley, but also the Frenchmen Honoré de Balzac, Théophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire, Alfred de

²⁵ Aldous Huxley, "Variations on *The Prisons*," *Themes and Variations* (New York: Harper, 1950), pp. 207-208.

²⁶ Huxley, *Prisons, with the 'Carceri' Etchings by G. B. Piranesi*, p. 21.

²⁷ Martin Christadler, "Giovanni Battista Piranesi und die Architekturmetapher der Romantik," *Miscellanea Anglo-Americana: Festschrift für Helmut Viebrock*, ed. Kuno Schuhmann (Munich: Pressler, 1974), p. 105n.1.

²⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, VIII: 1842-1843* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), p. 97; quoted in Christadler, "Giovanni Battista Piranesi," p. 78.

²⁹ Emerson, *The Journals*, VIII: 7; quoted in Christadler, "Giovanni Battista Piranesi," p. 105n.1.

Musset,³⁰ and no one less than Victor Hugo himself.³¹ The steps, stairs and spirals of the *Carceri* in fact fascinated the French Romantics enough to warrant book-length study.³²

Jorgen Andersen rightly argues that Gothic novels such as Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) owe their spatial-architectural inspiration to the *Carceri*.³³ Walpole, who had traveled on the continent, was familiar with Piranesi works other than the *Carceri* and commented in 1771 that,

This delicate redundance of ornament growing into our architecture might perhaps be checked, if our artists would study the sublime dreams of Piranesi, who seems to have conceived visions of Rome beyond what it boasted even in the meridian of its splendour. Savage as Salvator Rosa, fierce as Michelangelo, and exuberant as Rubens, he has imagined scenes that would startle geometry, and exhaust the Indies to realize. He piles palaces on bridges, and temples on palaces, and scales heaven with mountains of edifices. Yet what taste in his boldness! What grandeur in his wildness! What labour and thought in his rashness and details!³⁴

And in a discussion of the "'Gothic Villain' and 'Byronic Hero'" in which she describes the cliché of the Romantic hero who is at once "Satan, Cain, The Wandering Jew and Prometheus," Ingeborg Weber's phrasing of such a hero is reminiscent of the phrasing architectural historians use in describing Piranesi.³⁵ All these terms and person names belong to literary figures rather than architectural ones. Yet they are all influential names whose perception of Piranesi played rather lasting role. They seem to have been influential even in the very fact that *architectural* historians of the stature of Rykwert

³⁰ Jamieson, "Musset, De Quincey, and Piranesi," p. 105.

³¹ See Jean Mallion, *Victor Hugo et l'art architectural* (Paris: Imprimerie Allier, 1962), pp. 250, 264, 275ff., *et passim*.

³² Luzius Keller, *Piranèse et les romantiques français: Le myth des escaliers en spirales* (Paris: J. Corti, 1966). See also Georges Poulet's classic "Piranèse et les poètes romantiques français," *Nouvelle Revue Française* 27 (April, May 1966): 660-71, 849-62.

³³ Jorgen Andersen, "Giant Dreams: Piranesi's Influence in England," *English Miscellany* (Rome, 1952), III: 49-59. For a reading of *The Castle of Otranto* as the narrativization of the architectonics of the *Carceri*, see Christadler, "Giovanni Battista Piranesi," pp. 83ff. Also see Piranesi, *Carceri, d'Invenzione*; Piranesi, *Invenzioni capricci di carceri*; Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764; Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); William Beckford, *Vathek* (1786; Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1904; 1998).

³⁴ Walpole's word were quoted from the 'Advertisement' of Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England; with Some Account of the Principal Artists and Incidental Notes on Other Arts*, 4th ed., vol. 4 (London: Thomas Kirgate, 1771; 1786), p. 398.

³⁵ Ingeborg Weber, "'Gothic Villain' and 'Byronic Hero,'" *English Romanticism: The Paderborn Symposium*, ed. Rolf Breuer, et al. (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1985), p. 154.

and Tafuri refrain from viewing Piranesi's work architecturally and frame it from the perspective of the Romantic poet and the Gothic novelist.

More recently, however, there have emerged Piranesi critics who have not only *not* confined Piranesi to Romanticist madness, but even used Romantics like De Quincey to extricate Piranesi from this paradigm. Concerned mainly with the *Carceri* series, but also with the quite diverse *Vedute di Roma* (1748-1778), *Prima Parte di Architetture e Prospettive* (1743), *Grotteschi* (1745) and *Antichità*,³⁶ Peter Proudfoot has traced in a 1985 article Piranesi's emancipation from classical convention in order to open up the way for a "free-style architecture" that influenced the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries including the Postmodern movement.³⁷ Though Proudfoot's approach is supra-historical in a way this thesis is not, his interpretation is nevertheless welcome in so far as it recognizes the fact that Piranesi was in pursuit of a technique; and beyond technique, a *technology* of understanding building. Piranesi's research in this vein was directed at archaeological discovery—which Rykwert mistook for 'necrophilia' and Tafuri confused with 'monstrosity'.

Piranesi employed as much imagination *and* engineering know-how when he drew the yet-unexcavated substructures of ancient buildings as he did when he etched prisons. It took imagination to do so because the sub-terra structures Piranesi drew, *which upon later excavations proved to be correct*, were not known in his day. In order to execute these drawings, he participated in archaeological investigations, scrutinizing the buildings *in situ*. His biographer Jacques Guillaume Legrand conveys an anecdote about a site observation Piranesi undertook that could serve as the pre-history to the Romanticist perception of the architect's character. It seems that Piranesi was overtaken by bad weather during a site-visit and, deciding not to be deterred by it, donned appropriate labor clothes and went to work. To local peasant eyes, he signified an uncanny, satanic figure of medieval folklore:

He was drawing a grotto called del Bragantino, and was measuring the sections, perched on a ladder, accompanied by one Petrachi. The weather was stormy and for eight days the thunder had been grumbling almost without a break. A fisherman had been watching him for a long time in

³⁶ Piranesi, *Vedute di Roma, Disegnate ed Incise da Giambattista Piranesi* (Rome: n.p., 1762; 1778; 1836); Piranesi, *Prima Parte di Architetture, e Prospettive inventate ed incise da Gio. Batta. Piranesi Architetto Veneziano dedicate al Sig. Nicola Giobbe* (Rome: Stamperia de' Fratelli Pagliarini, 1743); Piranesi, *Le antichità romane*. For *Grotteschi* see Piranesi, *Opere varie*.

³⁷ Peter Proudfoot, "Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Neo-Classicism and the Rise of the Free-style in Architecture," *Architecture Australia* 74: 3 (1985): 74.

his odd dress (our artist was wearing an enormous hat with the brim turned down and a little hunting coat, very short, which gave him rather a fierce appearance) and he imagined that this singular character who was gesticulating, writing and often talking to himself, must be a sorcerer, and that he was moreover responsible for the bad weather which had gone on continuously since his arrival; he spread the idea, the alarm was given and the villagers armed and went off to do away with the sorcerer [...] It was only by the timely arrival of the Pope's official that he was saved from his fate.³⁸

Piranesi was working meticulously in the ruined sites to obtain realistic measurement. Although his diligence caused him to be regarded with suspicion by the natives, this anecdote shows us Piranesi's empirical approach to the science of architecture. In the preface to the *Antichità* (1756), he wrote that the mere recording of a monument's external features was insufficient and that this information had to be accompanied by plans, sections, internal views, nature of materials, and constructional techniques. And all had to be displayed on plate. The peasants were actually witnessing Piranesi at work on such a compilation.

Piranesi was not, however, only criticized by rural folk, but also by contemporary colleagues. In a letter to his brother written in the 1760s, Luigi Vanvitelli (1700-1773) described Piranesi in the following terms '[...] it is a strange thing that the mad Piranesi [*il Pazzo Piranesi*] dares to be an Architect; I shall only say that it is not a profession for madmen'.³⁹ Piranesi apparently was aware of some of his contemporaries' opinion of him. In various places in his work both written and visual, he responded to, or rather, commented on, this perception. His comments indicate that he had a specific explanation for the misguided perception. They are most elaborate in his *Antichità* and *Campo* series both of which comprise his archaeological investigations (and will be discussed in Chapter 3 below). We cannot stress enough, and shall investigate below, the remarkable correctness of Piranesi's archaeological drawings, which, Piranesi found, led some of his contemporaries to deem him mad. Indeed, claiming that Piranesi's drawings are replete with "obscurity" or "caprice," as we find Piranesi described by *our* contemporaries, constitutes yet another way of ignoring his productivity in a new eighteenth-century genre of drawing which he took further than contemporary artists like Giuseppe Vasi (1710-1782) or Hubert Robert

³⁸ Jacques Guillaume Legrand, *Nouvelles de l'estampe*, no. 5 (1969), p. 207. The translation of Legrand's words is quoted from Ian Jonathan Scott, *Piranesi* (London: Academy Editions; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), p. 174.

³⁹ Vanvitelli's words are quoted by Roberto Pane, "Luigi Vanvitelli – l'uomo e l'artista," *Napoli Nobilissima* 12: 1 (January-February 1973): 42.

(1733-1808), and the earlier Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770) had. This genre was, precisely, the *capriccio* that essentially brought together unexpected and paradoxical elements.⁴⁰ In Piranesi's hands the *capriccio* served the purpose of scientific invention and design innovation, as well as illustrate his view of architectural history. An important moment of recognition is offered by Barbara Maria Stafford in her "Bare versus Prismatic Style: Newton, Piranesi and Eighteenth-Century Theories of Abstraction in Art and Science," in which she approaches the novel, thus paradoxical, heterogeneity of elements in Piranesi's work from the perspective of Newtonian science:

[...] Piranesi materializes the elusive past, visibilizes the broken structure of historical knowledge—as Newton visibilized the heterogeneity of light—in the only form by which it had come down to the Moderns: as a discontinuous jumble composed of vestiges of a formerly whole antiquity that had to be imaginatively reconstructed. Thus Piranesi, like Newton, includes in his discovery not only the image of what was formerly remote and inaccessible, but the technique, process, derivation by which it was discovered or made manifest. The confused array it brought to the surface, and conflicting appearances are set side by side.⁴¹

Stafford's argument is tantamount to claiming that Newton himself realized the scientific revolution by thinking within the genre of the *capriccio*. The shifting of the classical paradigm in the eighteenth century is thus shown to have produced analogous methods in the different disciplines. These methods were bound to seem paradoxical to contemporary eyes.

Piranesi never changed his manner, however, and never waived in the face of hard critique. Perhaps as a reply to all of them, in 1765 he drew Plate IX of the *Parere su l'architettura* (Fig. 2.5).⁴² In the superscript of this magnificently innovative construction which is at once decorative design, engineered mechanism and visual historiography, he inscribed words from the Roman Sallust: "Novitatem meam

⁴⁰ On Piranesi's production in the *capriccio* genre see, Joanna Augustyn, "Subjectivity in the Fictional Ruin: The Caprice Genre," *Romanic Review* 91:4 (November 2000): 433-57. According to Augustyn, Piranesi's drawings can be included in the *capriccio* genre precisely because he drew and reconstructed the ruins of Rome not only by the help of his imagination but also by archaeological investigation.

⁴¹ Barbara Maria Stafford, "Bare versus Prismatic Style: Newton, Piranesi and Eighteenth-Century Theories of Abstraction in Art and Science," *The Romantic Imagination: Literature and Art in England and Germany*, eds. Frederick Burwick and Jürgen Klein (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 1996), p. 341.

⁴² Piranesi, *Parere su l'architettura* (Rome: n.p., 1765). Also see Piranesi, "Parere su l'architettura," in *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, pp. 140-41.

contemnunt, ego illorum ignaviam”: ‘They despise my novelty, I their timidity’ (Fig. 2.6).⁴³

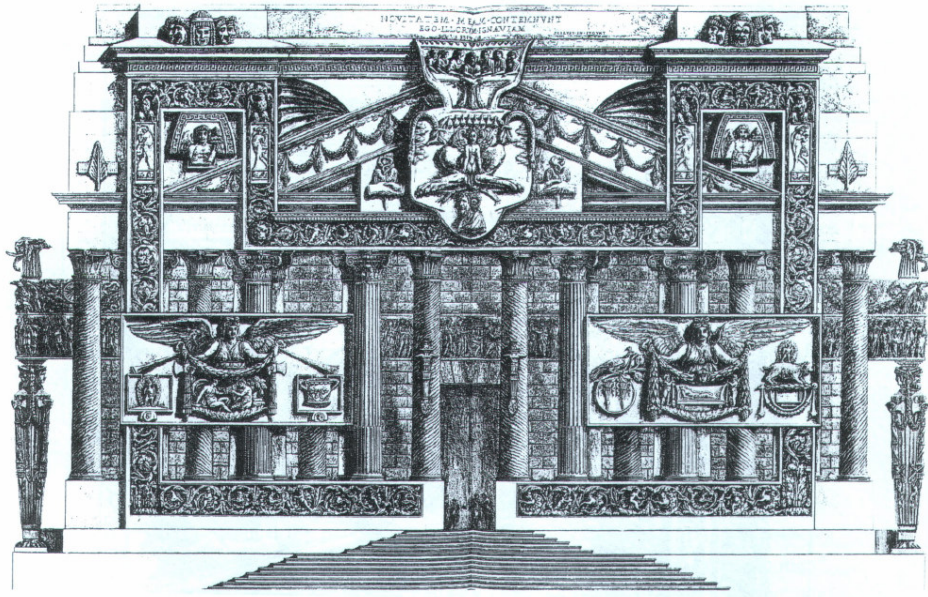


Figure 2.5. Plate IX, *Parere*, 1765

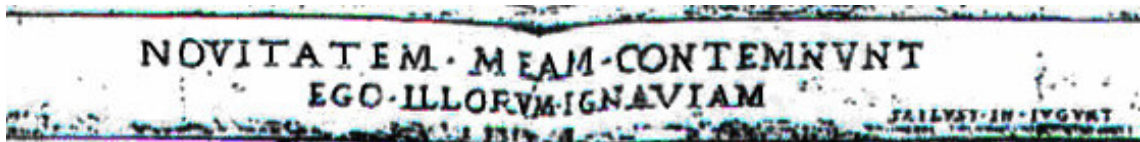


Figure 2.6. Plate IX, detail, *Parere*, 1765

Piranesi, of course, could not respond to the posthumous Romanticist appropriation of his *Carceri*. That remains for us to do. As we are going to see in Chapter 5 below, the *Carceri* series, upon which Romanticism based its view of the architect, were Piranesi’s contribution to a vitally important eighteenth-century

⁴³ Sallust’s original words in his *Bellum Iugurthinum* are as follows: “Nunc vos existimate facta an dicta pluris sint. Contemnunt novitatem meam, ego illorum ignaviam; mihi fortuna, illis probra obiectantur” [Think now yourselves whether words or deeds are worth more. They scorn my humble birth, I their worthlessness; I am taunted with my lot in life, they with their infamies]. Piranesi found Sallust’s words in “The War with Jugurtha” [*Sallust*, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 85. 14]. Piranesi’s inscription in Figure 2.5 is translated by Rykwert as, “They despise my humble birth [or: my originality] and I their cowardice” in *First Moderns*, p. 380; by Wittkower as, “They despise my novelty, I their timidity” in “Piranesi’s *Parere su l’architettura*,” *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2 (1938-39): 155n.81. Also see Piranesi, “*Parere su l’architettura*,” in *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, pp. 78n.99, 153.

movement to which that century greatly owes the name of 'Enlightenment': the movement for the humanization of the penal code and system, and the abolishment of the death penalty.

There is larger difficulty involved in understanding and interpreting an architect and writer by considering him in his own time and in his own context, rather than reading him as if he lived, worked and thought in an environment no different from ours. The research to be done is immense and Piranesi's *oeuvre* is complex. The failure of his major interpreters may be attributed to these factors and the very complex character of the eighteenth century. There is equally the necessity to work one's way through the mediation of the Romantics' perception which, as we have seen, twentieth-century critics tended to take for granted. Before we map out the milieu in which Piranesi wrote, drew and otherwise produced his work, however, an overview of his training and engagements is in order. Since so much contemporary Piranesi criticism today identifies man and work in an impasse of obsessive darkness, let us first trace the man. This will prove all the more worthwhile as there are no comprehensive modern biographies of Piranesi.

CHAPTER 3

ARCHITECTURAL BIOGRAPHY OF PIRANESI

There is no modern comprehensive biography of Piranesi. His earliest biographer is Legrand, whose *Notice historique sur la vie et sur les ouvrages de J. B. Piranesi, Architecte, Peintre et Graveur* was published in 1799.¹ Piranesi was born in Mogliano near Mestre (in Venice), on 4 October 1720, as the son of a stone-mason.² The Italian surname “Piranesi” derived from Piran in Istria and meant ‘from Piran’. Unsurprisingly perhaps for an architect keen on researching origins and etymologies, the patrinomic Piran must have borne special effect on Piranesi’s architectural-material preferences as the town was the center of good quality white lime-stone used in monuments in Venice.³ Use of stone in engineering and constructional details can be readily found in Piranesi’s drawings.

His formative years were spent in Venice, which in many ways shaped Piranesi’s conception of design so that eventually he was going to sign himself *architetto veneziano*,⁴ or in its Latin version *Architectus Venetus*, frequently abbreviated in plates as *Archit. V*. We have seen that others referred to him in the same fashion (Fig. 2.1). Yet Piranesi focused more on Rome than on Venice in the course of his career. This may have been expected because he grew up listening to stories of Roman heroes of Antiquity and their achievements told by his uncle Angelo. Angelo was a Carthusian

¹ Legrand in *Notice historique sur la vie et sur les ouvrages de J. B. Piranesi, Architecte, Peintre et Graveur [...] Redigée sur les notes et les pieces communiquées par ses fils, les Compagnons et les Continueurs de ses nombreux travaux* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale; Milan: G. Morazzoni, 1799; 1921) which was also published in *Nouvelles de l’estampe*, No. 5, 1969, p. 194. Also see Wilton-Ely, *Mind and Art*, p. 12; Luigi Ficacci’s introduction “The Discovery of Rome out of the Spirit of Piranesi,” to *Giovanni Battista Piranesi. The Complete Etchings* (Cologne and London: Taschen, 2005), pp. 7-39. For a brief biographical sketch, see Adolf K. Placzek, “The (Classical, Baroque, Rococo, Romantic, Modern) Vision of Piranesi,” *Harvard Magazine* 80 (January-February 1978): 27-33.

² For information about Piranesi’s birth, see Wilton-Ely, *Mind and Art*, p. 9; Penny, *Piranesi*, p. 5.

³ On Piran’s importance for Venice as a lime-stone center, see Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, pp. 1-2.

⁴ On Piranesi’s signature of *architetto veneziano* see Hind, “Giovanni Battista Piranesi and His *Carceri*,” p. 81; Felice Stampfle, “An Unknown Group of Drawings by Giovanni Battista Piranesi,” *Art Bulletin* 30: 2 (1948): 122-41; Wittkower, “Piranesi as Architect,” in Smith College Museum of Art’s exhibition catalogue, *Piranesi*, p. 99.

monk and tutored Piranesi in Latin and ancient history.⁵ Already before he reached his twenties, Piranesi decided to become an architect. Still in Venice, he was first apprenticed to his maternal uncle Matteo Lucchesi who was an architect and hydraulics engineer in the *Magistrato delle Acque*, a unit responsible for developing the Republic's harbor and the construction of the *murazze* (the cyclopean masonry walls protecting the Venetian lagoon from the waves of the Adriatic).⁶ Before 1740, he also worked with the Palladian architect Giovanni Scalfarotto (1690-1752) who was the senior colleague of Lucchesi from the *Magistrato*. Piranesi worked with him on the design of the church S. Simeone Piccolo overlooking the Grand Canal. While working with Scalfarotto, Piranesi assisted Scalfarotto's nephew, the architect Tommaso Temanza (1705-1789), participating in measuring the Augustus Bridge in Rimini of which drawings were later published by Temanza under the title of *Antichità di Rimini*.⁷ Temanza was working on the theory and history of Venetian architecture and published eventually, in 1778, a collection of biographies of sixteenth-century Venetian sculptors and architects.⁸ Temanza was also involved in the remains of Classical Antiquity, whereby he may have initiated an interest in Piranesi for Roman Antiquity and archaeology.⁹

In the artistic and theoretical context of Venice, during Piranesi's youth, the Franciscan monk Carlo Lodoli's (1690-1761) teachings had currency. Lodoli's arguments were based generally on the function and use of materials and architectural aesthetics. Lodoli examined the origins of Roman architecture and posited Etruscan stone construction as the prototype of Roman structures. He also advocated that Etruscan architecture had been derived from the Egyptian—as Piranesi too was going to

⁵ On Piranesi's education in Latin and history with his uncle, see Peter John Murray, *Piranesi and the Grandeur of Ancient Rome* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), p. 8; Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, p. 3, 32n.6.

⁶ For Piranesi's apprenticeship to his maternal uncle see Rykwert, *First Moderns*, p. 315; Ficacci's introduction "The Discovery of Rome out of the Spirit of Piranesi," to *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, p. 13.

⁷ Tommaso Temanza, *Le antichità di Rimini* (Venice, 1741). Besides, for Piranesi's participation with Temanza in the measurements of the Augustus Bridge in Rimini, see Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, p. 9, 32n.20.

⁸ Temanza, *Vite dei più celebri Architetti e Scultori Veneziani che fiorirono nel Secolo Decimosesto* (Venice, 1778); ed. L. Grassi (Milan: Labor, 1966).

⁹ For Wilton-Ely's interpretation of Temanza's influence on Piranesi see his *Mind and Art*, p. 9. On Temanza's work, see Temanza, *Le antichità di Rimini*; Temanza, *Vite dei più celebri Architetti*; Lionello Puppi, "La fortuna delle *Vite* nel Veneto dal Ridolfi al Temanza," *Il Vasari. Storiografo e artista* (Florence, 1976), pp. 408-26.

claim later—and thought even that the Doric order must be called the Egyptian order on account of its origins.¹⁰ There was already some research and excavation done for Lodoli's unorthodox views to be tested by empirical proof, but for the greater part, his theory required imagination. Giambattista Vico (1668- 1744) had published the *Principi di una scienza nuova* (Principles of a new science) in 1725, in which he had stated that the only way to comprehend the past was through imaginative study of the architectural and literary remains of the past.¹¹ Vico's philosophy offered a freedom for new directions of regarding those architectural and literary remains which were coupled by Lodoli's unconventional application in architectural theorizing. Piranesi too, was going to produce drawing and literature alike by support of the findings at excavations and by reference to ancient texts. Although we do not find any clear reference to Vico in Piranesi's works, we know that Vico had influenced Lodoli and his teachings which Piranesi was well aware of when he was in Venice in his formative years.

Aside from acquaintance with Lodoli's teachings, the importance of Venice appears also in Piranesi's conception of stage design, since opera houses and theatres were offering opportunities for the imagination of young designers. “[T]he many opera-houses in that pleasure resort,” observed Alpheus Hyatt Mayor, “did not attract their international audiences by well-written plays, but by the ingenious contrivance of their scenery.”¹² Legrand claims that in his formative years Piranesi studied stage design. His training in stage design oddly is a controversial topic for some scholars like Peter John Murray, who maintain that Piranesi lacked such training.¹³ Others, like Wilton-Ely, deem such training rather probable.¹⁴ We can, however, observe strong traces of stage design in Piranesi's drawing as diverse as, for example, the *Carceri* series and the *Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini ed ogni altra parte degli edifizzi* (1769).¹⁵

¹⁰ For Lodoli's advocacy of Etruscan and Egyptian architectures and for his interpretation of the Doric order, see Wilton-Ely's Introduction to his edition of Piranesi's *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, p. 21.

¹¹ Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970).

¹² Alpheus Hyatt Mayor, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi* (New York: H. Bittner & Co., 1952), p. 4.

¹³ Murray, *Piranesi and the Grandeur of Ancient Rome*, p. 8.

¹⁴ Wilton-Ely, *Mind and Art*, p. 10.

¹⁵ Piranesi, *Carceri, d'Invenzione*; Piranesi, *Invenzioni capricci di carceri*; Piranesi, *Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini ed ogni altra parte degli edifizzi desunte dall'architettura Egizia, Etrusca, e Greca, con un ragionamento apologetico in difesa dell'architettura Egizia e Toscana [...]* (Rome: n.p.,

Moreover, we know that he extensively studied different perspective techniques under different masters, and perspective technique and stage design largely overlapped in the Venice of the time. Piranesi's drawing technique reflects the influence of the Venetian perspective expert Carlo Zucchi, from whom we know Piranesi learnt perspective techniques as well as etching.¹⁶ Wilton-Ely argues that Piranesi had studied perspective with the Valeriani brothers who were working on stage designs. Similarly, we know that he was also trained in perspective under Ferdinando-Galli Bibiena (1657-1743),¹⁷ who had invented the perspective device named *scene vedute per angolo*.¹⁸ Nonetheless, we may at least be certain that Piranesi had studied Bibiena's treatise, *Architettura civile*

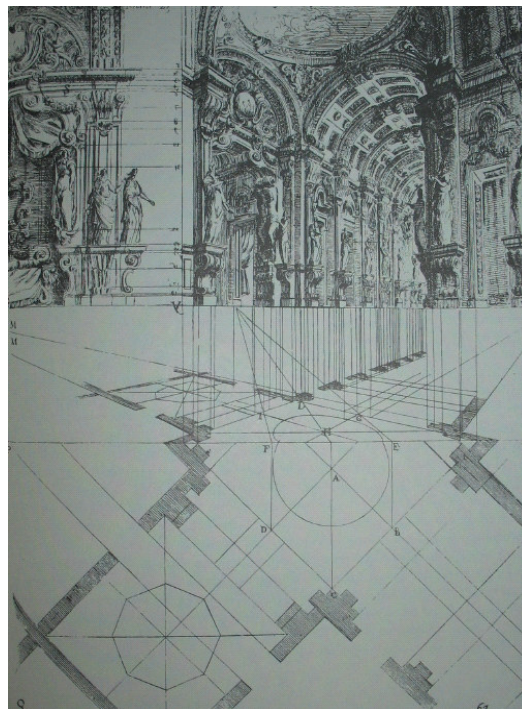


Figure 3.1. Ferdinando Galli-Bibiena, Copper 23, scene design viewed at an angle, *Architettura civile*, 1711

1769; Paris: n.p., 1836). References to the latter work will be henceforward indicated in parentheses in the text.

¹⁶ For information about relations between Carlo Zucchi and Piranesi, see Ficacci's introduction "The Discovery of Rome out of the Spirit of Piranesi," to *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, p. 13; Penny, *Piranesi*, p. 5.

¹⁷ For a brief discussion of Piranesi's training in perspective under Bibiena see Wilton-Ely, *Mind and Art*, p. 10; and Penny, *Piranesi*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Ferdinando Galli-Bibiena, *Architettura civile preparata su la Geometri* (Parma, 1711). Also see Bibiena, "Architettura civile," *The Italian Baroque Stage*, trans. and commentary by Dunbar H. Ogden (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 46-47.

preparata su la Geometri of 1711, which set forth the principles of the said perspective device.¹⁹ One may compare, for example, Bibiena's Copper 23 (Fig. 3.1) from *Architettura civile* and Piranesi's *Gruppo di Scale* (Fig. 3.2) from the *Prima Parte* (1743), the latter evinces study of Bibiena, Piranesi's *Gruppo di Scale* is a faithful application of Bibiena's *scene vedute per angolo*.

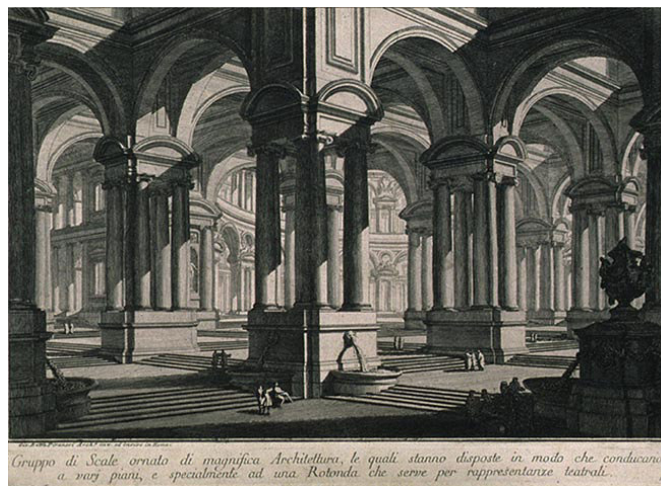


Figure 3.2. *Gruppo di Scale* (Stairs), *Prima Parte*, 1743

By the time he went to Rome as a draughtsman in 1740, in the commission of the ambassador Marco Foscarini, Piranesi's mind must have been replete with views representing the achievements and magnificence of the Roman past. The Roman landscape of the time was dominated by antique fragments and early Christian basilicas as may be glimpsed in Giovanni Paolo Pannini's (1691-1765) 1747 city-scape (Fig. 3.3). While these views stimulated Piranesi's imagination, he must have despaired of the insufficient job potential for young architects in Rome. Apart from Foscarini's support, during his first years in Rome, Piranesi worked in the studio of the Venetian builder Nicola Giobbe, who offered him the use of his books and engravings and showed him the important Roman monuments. Furthermore, in Giobbe's studio, Piranesi was introduced to two eminent architects of his day, Luigi Vanvitelli and Niccolò Salvi (1697-1751).²⁰

¹⁹ For Venetian painters' method of designing scenes see Bibiena, "*Architettura civile*," p. 64.

²⁰ For Piranesi work in Giobbe's studio and his acquaintance with the said architects, see Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, pp. 1-2, 3, 32n.8; Ficacci's introduction "The Discovery of Rome out of the Spirit of Piranesi," to *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, p. 27.



Figure 3.3. Giovanni Paolo Pannini, *View of the Roman Forum*, 1735

In this environment, Piranesi apparently decided to work on topographical engraving; for, he entered the studio of the Sicilian engraver Vasi who had been the pupil of Filippo Juvarra (1678-1736) and was an eminent *vedute* (views) engraver of Rome. Piranesi learnt from him techniques of etching for *vedute* drawings. They drew Roman landscape pictures to sell to tourists—especially to British aristocrats—coming on the Grand Tour.²¹ In Vasi’s studio Piranesi established friendship with Polanzani who drew the Piranesi portrait we saw in Fig. 2.1. According to Legrand, Piranesi eventually quarreled with Vasi who observed that, “You are too much of a painter, my friend, to be an engraver.”²² We will have occasion to return to this statement in Chapter 6.

Piranesi had to develop his own etching style to express his own unique architectural and historical viewpoint as well as his archaeological hypotheses. Probably

²¹ The Grand Tour was an intellectual tour including Italy, France, Germany, and Switzerland and topped university studies. Rome was the center and starting point of this tour. The eighteenth-century artistic and social character of Rome has been rendered in the exhibition catalogues *Il Settecento a Roma, Mostra promossa dall’Associazione Amici dei Musei di Roma, 19 March-31 May 1959* (Rome, 1959); and *The Academy of Europe: Rome in the Eighteenth Century*, The William Benton Museum of Art (University of Connecticut, 1973). Also see V. E. Giuntella, *Roma nel Settecento* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1971), and Wilton-Ely, *Mind and Art*, p. 11.

²² See Legrand in *Notice historique sur la vie* which was also published in *Nouvelles de l’estampe*, p. 194.

in order to do this, in the years 1743 and 1744, he undertook a trip to the south to see the Herculaneum excavations lying south-east of Naples, Vico's city.²³ The Herculaneum excavation had been launched in 1738. Pasteur Bardet had taken over the excavation in 1741 and was going to head them until 1745, so we may conjecture that Piranesi made this prominent archaeologist's acquaintance. The primary importance of Piranesi's participation at Herculaneum is that, while archaeology—really termed 'antiquarianism' before Piranesi—had until then been a kind of treasure-hunting out to look for precious, collectible artefacts, the work done at Herculaneum was geared toward uncovering architectural remains toward revealing the urban texture as a whole.²⁴

Piranesi became a member of the Accademia dell'Arcadia (founded in 1690) which had a wide artistic perspective on the visual arts.²⁵ The Accademia must have borne substantial influence on Piranesi as he used the Arcadian pseudonym *Salcindio Tiseo* in the drawing series of the *Prima Parte* including twelve plates dedicated to Giobbe. Werner Oechslin maintains that around this time, Piranesi established familiarity with a number of books prepared before his time but published relatively recently, all of which bore significance for archaeological drawing: Bianchini's drawings of the *Palazzo de' Cesari*, published posthumously in incomplete form²⁶ and his and Gori's drawings of the *Camere de' Liberti*²⁷ were among these.²⁸ Via Appia had

²³ On the history of excavations in Herculaneum, see Christopher Charles Parslow, *Rediscovering Antiquity, Karl Weber and the Excavations of Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Stabiae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), especially pp. 19-30, pp. 38ff.

²⁴ For the impetus of the discoveries at Herculaneum in the emergence of archaeology and for the description of the general environment in which this discipline arose, see Carlos Sambricio, "Piranesi y el Parere," *Revista de Ideas Estéticas* (Madrid), trans. Ester Benítez, no. 117 (1972), pp. 82ff.

²⁵ For the importance of the Accademia dell'Arcadia in eighteenth-century Rome, see Sandro Benedetti, "L'architettura dell'Arcadia, Roma 1730," in *Bernardo Vittone e la disputa fra classicismo e barocco nel Settecento: Atti del convegno internazionale promosso dall'Accademia delle scienze di Torino [...], 21-24 settembre 1970* (Turin: Accademia delle Scienze, 1972), 337-91; see also Benedetti, "Per un'architettura dell'Arcadia: Roma 1730," *Controspazio* 3: 7-8 (1971): 2-17. For Piranesi's participation in the Accademia, see Wilton-Ely's Introduction to his edition of Piranesi's *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, p. 5.

²⁶ Francesco Bianchini, *Del Palazzo de' Cesari opera postuma* (Verona: Berno, 1738).

²⁷ Bianchini, *Camera ad Inscrizioni Sepulcrali de' Liberti, Servi, ed Ufficiali della Casa di Augusto scoperte nella Via Appia [...]* (Rome: Salvioni, 1727); Antonio Francesco Gori, *Momentum sive Columbarium Libertorum et Servorum Liviae Augustae et Caesarum Romae detectum in Via Appia anno 1726 [...]* (Florence: Tartinius & Franchius, 1727).

²⁸ Werner Oechslin, "Pyramide et sphère: Notes sur l'architecture révolutionnaire du XVIII^e siècle et ses sources italiennes," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 6th ser., 77 (1971): 401.

been discovered in 1726. In 1731, there had appeared yet another book of drawing on the discoveries, namely by Pierleone Ghezzi.²⁹ We may surmise that Piranesi found access to an archive where he might see these books in the milieu of the Accademia. Thus with Oechslin, we may state that it was entirely understandable that Piranesi included in his *Prima Parte* of 1743 a view of the same *Camera de' Liberti*.³⁰

But Piranesi arrived at results very different from those in his models, the predecessor etchings mentioned above. Differences even superficially observable between Piranesi's *Mausoleo antico* (Fig. 3.4) from the *Prima Parte* and Bianchini's elevation of *Palatine* (Fig. 3.5) from the *Del Palazzo de' Cesari Verona* already

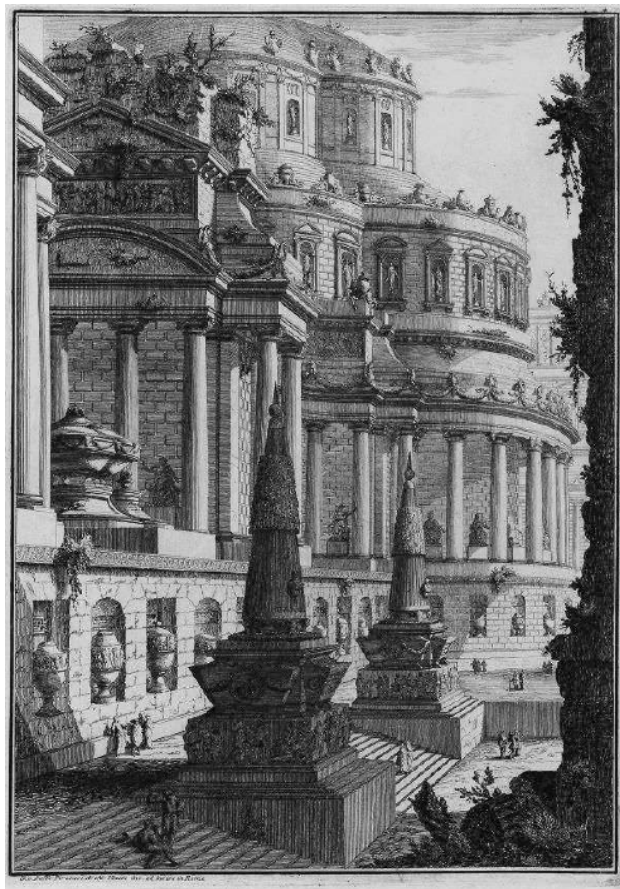


Figure 3.4. *Mausoleo antico*, *Prima Parte*, 1743

²⁹ Pier Leone Ghezzi, *Camere Sepolcrali di Liberti e Liberte di Livia Augusta et altri Cesari* (Rome: Rossi, 1731).

³⁰ Werner Oechslin, "L'intérêt archéologique et l'expérience architecturale avant et après Piranèse," *Piranèse et les Français. Colloque Tenu à la Villa Médicis, 12-14 Mai 1976*, ed. Georges Brunel (Rome: Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1978), p. 401.

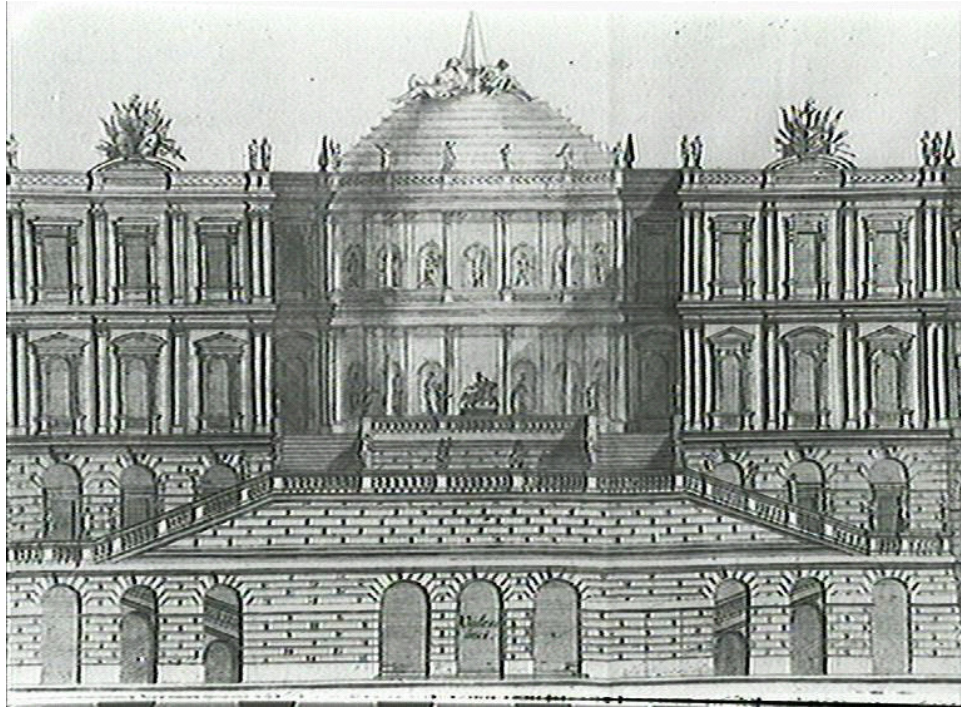


Figure 3.5. Elevation of *Palatine, Del Palazzo de' Cesari Verona*, 1738

demonstrate that Piranesi *Verona* already demonstrate that Piranesi was researching into an alternative, into a way of drawing that would be truer to the nature of the historical science of archaeology than to the classical art of drawing employed in designing buildings *ex nihilo*. If the art of architectural design was based on the Albertian grid of orthogonals and diagonals as in Bianchini's elevation, we find in Piranesi's plate an approach that replaces octagonal representation by an idealized perspective that confers upon the archaeological artefact a situated-ness (with context) and condition outside the Albertian grid. We may also once again observe in Fig. 3.2, Piranesi's use of Venetian stage design techniques.

We shall only for now call Piranesi's an "idealized perspective." In Chapter 6 below, we are going to locate the precise eighteenth-century context where Piranesi found the means of underscoring the difference for archaeological drawing aside from stage design, namely the philosophical category of the *sublime*. But Piranesi equally found the justification for the difference in the genre of the *capriccio*. At the time, in the 1740s, Piranesi was conducting his research in a manner which we may term the *antique capriccio*.

This style of drawing in *Prima Parte* which was found peculiar to Piranesi in his time and is found peculiar today, nevertheless caused him to establish friendship with

art and architecture students in the Académie de France in Rome.³¹ Most Piranesi critics would not agree with our reading. They do not find that *Prima Parte* carries unique importance in Piranesi's career because it contains some plates which served him as basis for establishing his own architectural style. In fact, Piranesi was experimenting with different means of bringing together available innovative techniques, seeking for the appropriate balance/synthesis between the architectural and archaeological. The *Prima Parte* plate entitled *Gruppo di Scale* (Stairs) we saw above (Fig. 3.2), which was produced by Bibiena's perspective device of the *scene* (Fig. 3.1), was going to establish Piranesi's reputation. It is worth mentioning here at least the names of some other memorable plates from the *Prima Parte*: *Carcere oscura* (Dark prison) (Fig. 3.6), *Mausoleo antico* (Ancient mausoleum) (Fig. 3.4), *Galleria grande di Statue* (Large sculpture gallery) (Fig. 3.7), *Campidoglio antico* (Ancient Capitol) (Fig. 3.8), and *Ponte magnifico* (Magnificent bridge) (Fig. 3.9).³² These plates address diverse themes and

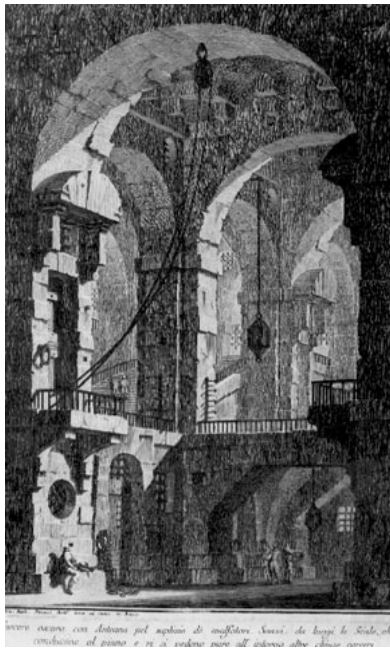


Figure 3.6. *Carcere oscura*, *Prima Parte*, 1743

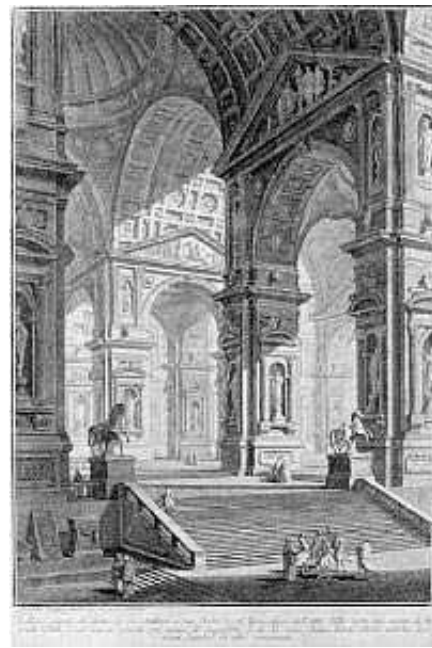


Figure 3.7. *Galleria grande di Statue*, *Prima Parte*, 1743

³¹ For the relations between Piranesi and the students of Académie de France see Wilton-Ely's Introduction to his edition of Piranesi's *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, p. 5. For the foundation of Académie de France see Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 190-91.

³² For the whole *Prima Parte* plates and their titles in English, German and French see Ficacci, ed., *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*.



Figure 3.8. *Campidoglio antico, Prima Parte*, 1743

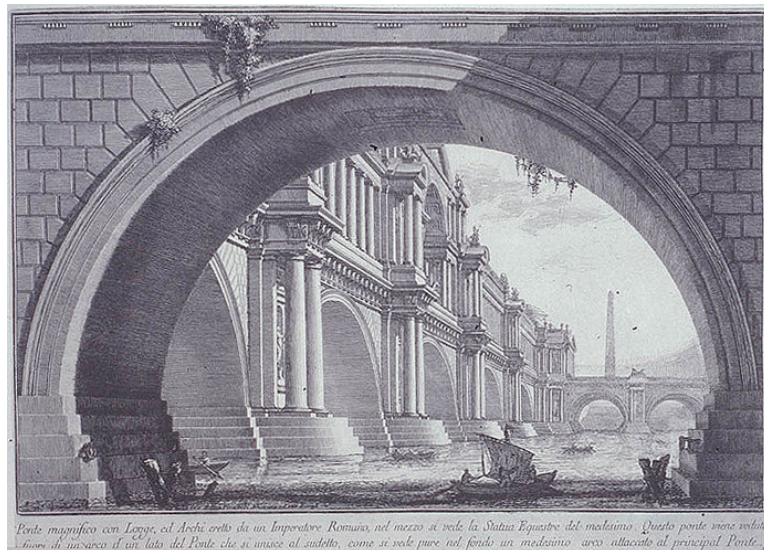


Figure 3.9. *Ponte magnifico, Prima Parte*, 1743

architectural types. Common to all of them, however, is the focus on *layering* of historical-structural-stylistic strata. It was perhaps in this framework that Bibiena's technique of the *scene* proved particularly helpful to Piranesi's purposes: Bibiena's method of the *scene* necessarily focused on such layering for the simple reason that, quite differently from the realist-naturalist stage of the nineteenth century, the theatrical stage of the time was painted or drawn on multiple panels that represented more often exterior urban sites than interiors or rural landscapes. Thus the *scene* involved the

drawing of architectural layers, structures which did not always find their spatial articulation from the perspective of a single vanishing point in the rear of the stage. Thus, “how to change the vanishing point” in mid-scene, and how to construct, with painted panels, a “ceiling perspective,” for example, were among prime problems.³³ The plates in Fig. 3.6 and 3.7 handle these questions simultaneously. Drawing for the stage equally included using oblique wings which presented particular problems. Bibiena demonstrated their solution in Copper 24 of his book (Fig. 3.10).

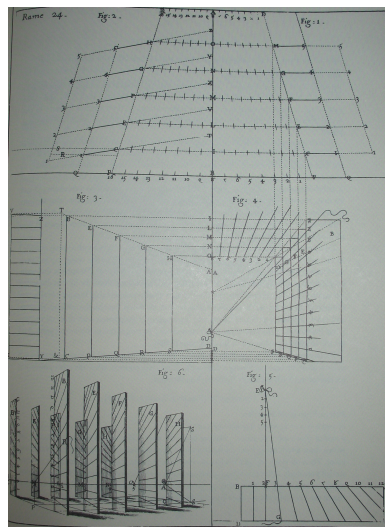


Figure 3.10. Ferdinando Galli-Bibiena, Copper 24, designing scenes by using the method of Venetian painters, *Architettura civile*, 1711

We may also glance at Baldassare Orsini’s (1732-1810) *Le scene del nuovo Teatro del Verzaro di Perugia* (1785) for juxtaposition with Piranesi plates of the *Prima Parte*.³⁴ Orsini’s *Le scene* was yet another work of Venetian stage-design practice. Piranesi’s *Carcere oscura* in the *Prima Parte* (1743, Fig. 3.6), and Plate VI of later *Carceri* (1760, Fig. 3.11), seem to have been re-worked from Orsini’s Plate XIII in the *Le scene* (1785, Fig. 3.12). Orsini’s Plate XI (1785, Fig. 3.13) is reminiscent of Piranesi’s *Ponte Magnifico* (1743, Fig. 3.9), and Plate X (1785, Fig. 3.14) recalls *Campidoglio antico* (1743, Fig. 3.8). We also find close similarity between Orsini’s Plate LXVII (Fig. 3.15)—providing a solution for Problem VI concerning how to represent a scene viewed at an angle on the wings—in his *Della geometria e prospettiva*

³³ Bibiena, “*Architettura civile*,” p. 160.

³⁴ Baldassare Orsini, *Le scene del nuovo Teatro del Verzaro di Perugia* (Perugia, 1785). Also see Orsini, “*Le scene*,” in *The Italian Baroque Stage*, pp. 98-166.

*pratica*³⁵ (1773) and, again, Piranesi's *Gruppo di Scale* from the *Prima Parte* (1743, Fig. 3.2). Martin Christadler maintains that the *Carceri* derive from theater and stage design.³⁶ The examples juxtaposing Orsini and Piranesi should prove him right. Ulya Vogt-Göknil, whose 1958 book is the first detailed study of the reception of Piranesi's *Carceri* in the field of literature, argues that far from serving isolation and incarceration, the architectonics of the *Carceri* 'serve to connect and to mediate' and finds that the bridges, stairs, hanging chains and ropes for swinging are reminiscent of theatrical sets and should be researched in relation to such set design in Piranesi's vicinity.³⁷ Finally, Maurizio Calvesi, in his Introduction to *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, ascribes much of the aspects of Piranesi's work to "esperienza scenografica"—scenographic experience.³⁸

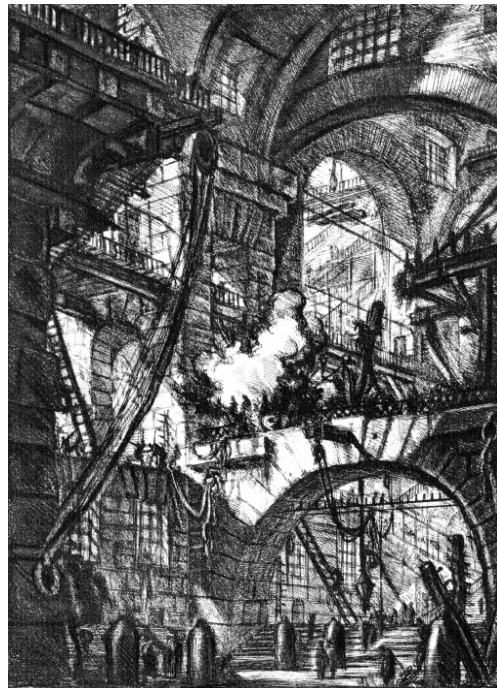


Figure 3.11. Plate VI, *Carceri d'Invenzione*, 1760

³⁵ Orsini, *Della geometria e prospettiva pratica* (Rome, 1773). Also see Orsini, "Geometria," in *The Italian Baroque Stage*, pp. 76-83.

³⁶ Christadler, "Giovanni Battista Piranesi," p. 78.

³⁷ Ulya Vogt-Göknil, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: Carceri* (Zürich: Origo Verlag, 1958), pp. 40-45. Also see Vogt-Göknil, "Piranesi als Architekturtheoretiker und Polemiker," *Piranesi tra Venezia e l'Europa*, ed. Alessandro Bettagno, proceedings, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, 13-15 October 1978 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1983), pp. 389-95.

³⁸ Henri Focillon, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, ed. Maurizio Calvesi e Augusta Monferini, Traduzione di Giuseppe Guglielmi, A translation of "Giovanni-Battista Piranesi" and "Essai de Catalogue Raisonné de l'œuvre de J.-B. Piranesi" (Bologna: Alfa, 1967), p. VI.

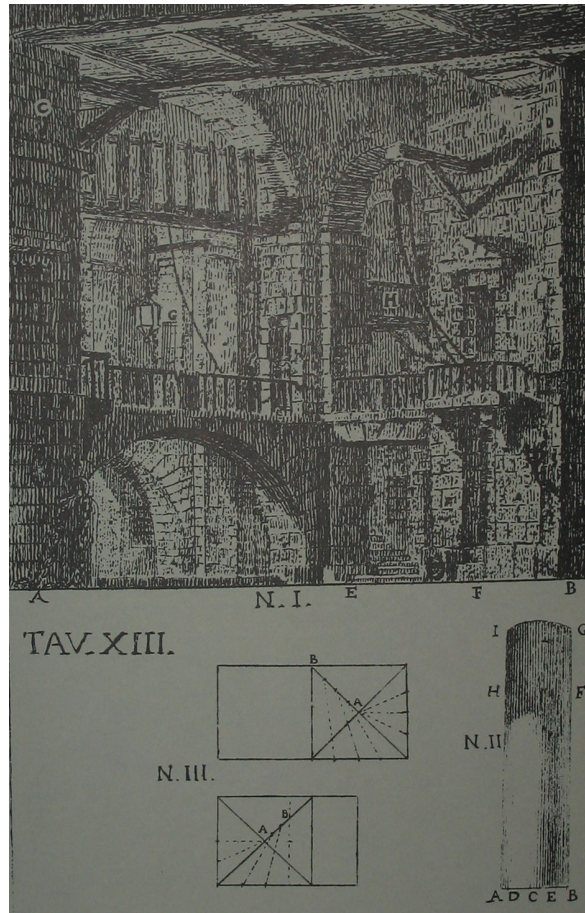


Figure 3.12. Baldassare Orsini, Plate XIII, *Le scene*, 1785

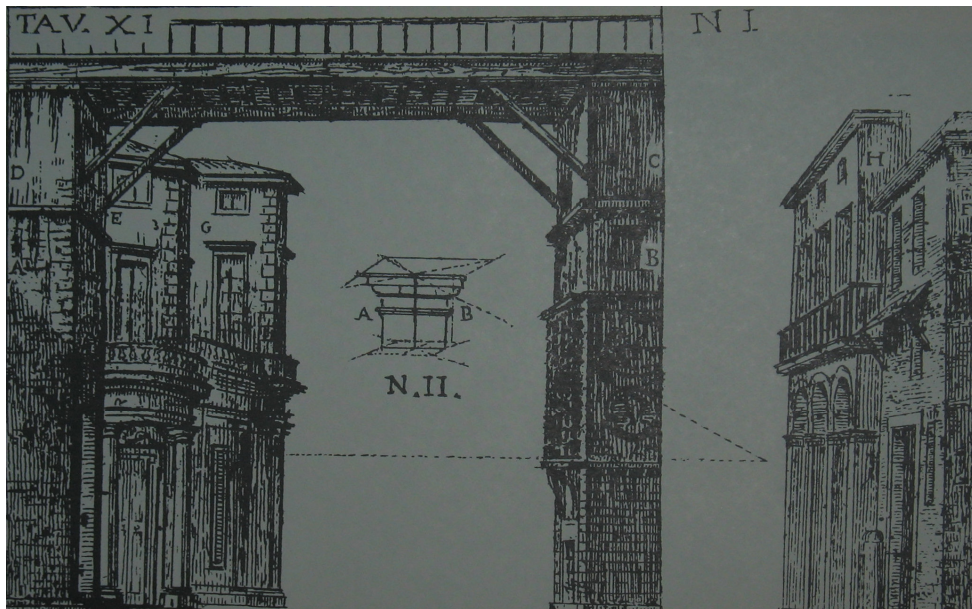


Figure 3.13. Baldassare Orsini, Plate XI, *Le scene*, 1785



Figure 3.14. Baldassare Orsini, Plate X, *Le scene*, 1785

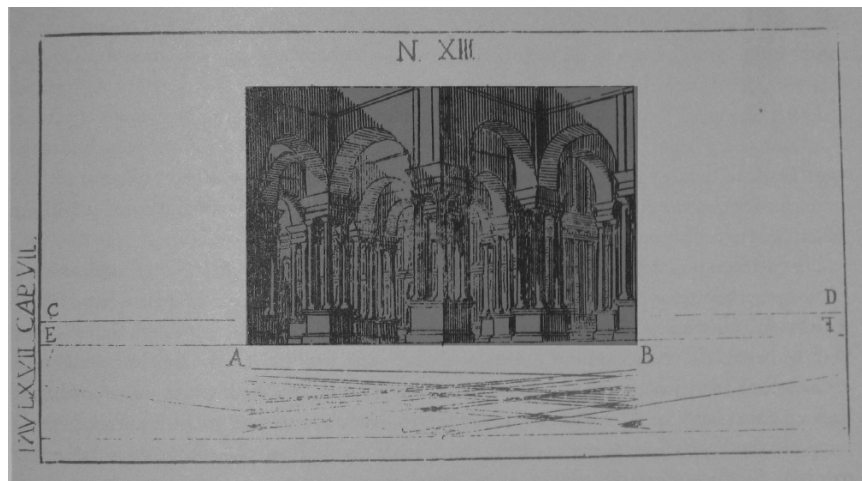


Figure 3.15. Baldassare Orsini, Plate LXVII, *Geometria*, 1773

As we are going to see again in Chapter 6 below, Piranesi was going to continue throughout his lifetime to re-draw others' drawings. These re-workings did not express his "megalomania" that made him deem himself superior so as to be able to improve others' work.³⁹ He was trying to dislocate drawing from the classicist paradigm, demonstrating this difference in concrete relation to concrete extant drawings.

³⁹ For the interpretation of Piranesi's "megalomania" see Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture*, ed. Dan Cruickshank (Oxford: Architectural Press, 1996), p. 846.

In 1743 and 1744, as already mentioned, Piranesi joined the excavations at Herculaneum. Nonetheless his financial resources were running out. Thus he had to return to Venice in 1744.⁴⁰ In 1745, with Académie de France students, Piranesi published the collective work entitled *Varie Vedute di Roma Antica e Moderna*.⁴¹ This work has ninety drawings: forty-three of them were signed by Jean Barbault (1718-1762), Laurent Le Geay (1710-1786) and Philothée-François Duflos (1710-1746), all of whom were students of Académie de France. Forty-seven were signed by Piranesi. Piranesi's drawings have, however, more elaborate character than the others'. When we compare Duflos' and Barbault's drawings, Piranesi's difference becomes quite obvious. As proof of Piranesi's influence, we may cite the drawing of the Arch of Constantine by Barbault (Fig. 3.16) to compare it with Piranesi's drawing of the same (Fig. 3.17).⁴² Piranesi's drawing dates to 1748 while Barbault's is dated 1761. Piranesi's relinquishment of the frontal section for the *scene vedute per angolo* that offers simultaneous views of outside and inside—thus of the totality of the building—and the articulation of the front façade along with the side, as well as the environmental context is evident in Barbault in 1761.



Figure 3.16. Jean Barbault, *L'Arco di Costantino Monumenti di Roma antica originale, Les plus beaux Monumens de Rome ancienne*, 1761

⁴⁰ For information about Piranesi's return to Venice and the cause of this return see Ficacci's introduction "The Discovery of Rome out of the Spirit of Piranesi," to *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, pp. 16-18.

⁴¹ Piranesi, *Varie Vedute di Roma Antica e Moderna incise da Celebri Autori a Spese di Fausto Amidei* (Rome: n.p., 1745).

⁴² Jean Barbault, *Le plus beaux monumens de Rome ancienne* (Rome, 1761); Piranesi, *Vedute di Roma*.

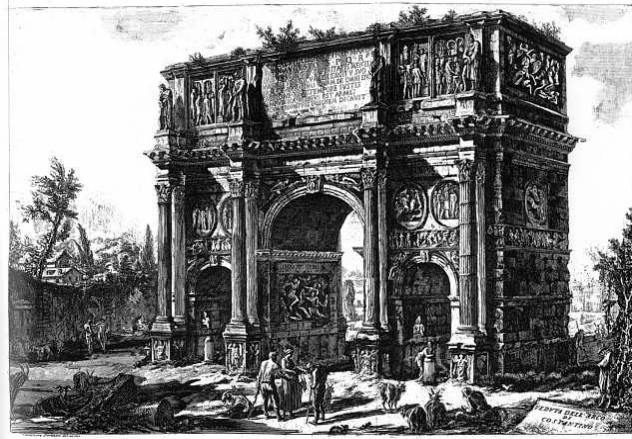


Figure 3.17. *Veduta dell' Arco di Costantino, Vedute*, 1748

Another figure that was prominent in Piranesi's milieu whose work enables us to situate Piranesi's project was Pannini, perspective professor at the Académie de France whose fantasy drawings of ruins belong to this period of the birth of archaeology (Fig. 3.3). Pannini also worked on stage designs for Juvarra. Piranesi's engravings were imaginary compositions designed on the basis of real views of ruins. Pannini's works also were imaginary compositions which were drawn accurately to obtain a more realistic sense of the past.

In 1747, Piranesi turned from Venice to Rome again, to sell his engravings to the Venetian merchant Giuseppe Wagner. He communicated with Juvarra who was designing the stage for the theatre of Cardinal Ottobani of the Cancelleria. After meeting with Juvarra, we find Piranesi again producing a set of drawings (Fig. 3.18), this time re-interpreting Juvarra's early works for Filippo Amadei's opera *Teodosio il Giovane*.⁴³ Research into Juvarra reveals what is a most important clue for this thesis' argument about Piranesi: we thereby come to the source of where Piranesi may have come across the idea of demonstrating a different effect precisely by re-working a given drawing, as we are going to find him doing in Chapter 6 below. Though more archival research is required to date the drawings, the mode in which Juvarra's architectural fantasy of a *Scena per angolo* with trophies (Fig. 3.19) is re-worked by Antonio Galli-Bibiena (Fig. 3.20) underscores Piranesi's engagement with Galli-Bibiena. Working in

⁴³ Filippo Juvarra, *Scena di Teodosio il Giovane* Filippo Amadei (Rome, 1711). For Piranesi's communication with Juvarra and for discussion of Piranesi's drawings after Juvarra see Murray, *Piranesi and the Grandeur of Ancient Rome*, pp. 20-21.

Rome was re-inforcing Piranesi's inclination toward archaeological investigation, and in 1748 he began the series *Vedute di Roma* which were continued throughout his life.



Figure 3.18. A sketch by Piranesi after Juvarra's design for Amadei's opera *Teodosio il Giovane* of 1711



Figure 3.19. Filippo Juvarra, *Scena per angolo*

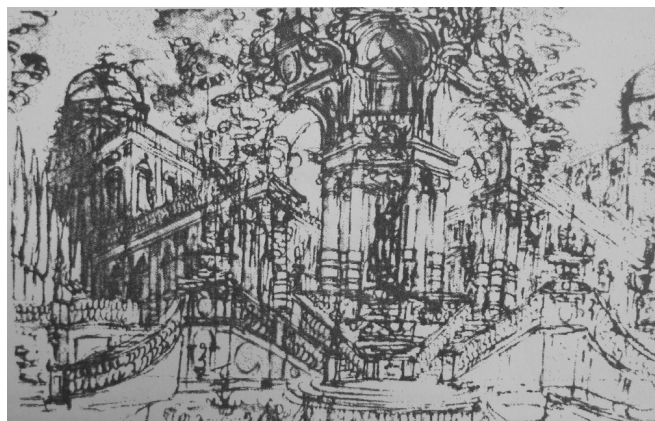


Figure 3.20. Antonio Galli-Bibiena, *Scénographie*

Piranesi's other important work of 1750 were the *Opere varie*. Two specifically important plates in this work are the *Parte di ampio magnifico porto* (Fig. 4.7) and *Pianta di ampio magnifico collegio* (Fig. 3.21), which drew great attention from young architects of the time. Among them were Académie pensionnaires like Charles de Wailly (1729-1798) and Marie-Joseph Peyre (1730-1785) (Fig. 3.22).⁴⁴ These drawings provided new design ideas and represented a creative way in architecture, and remained archaeological.

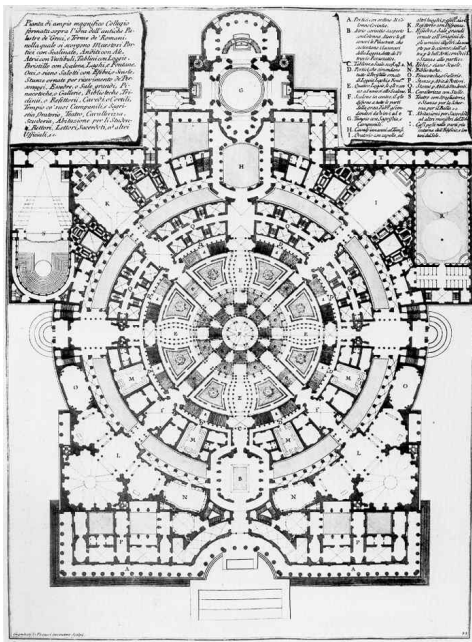


Figure 3.21. *Pianta di ampio magnifico collegio*, *Opere varie*, 1750

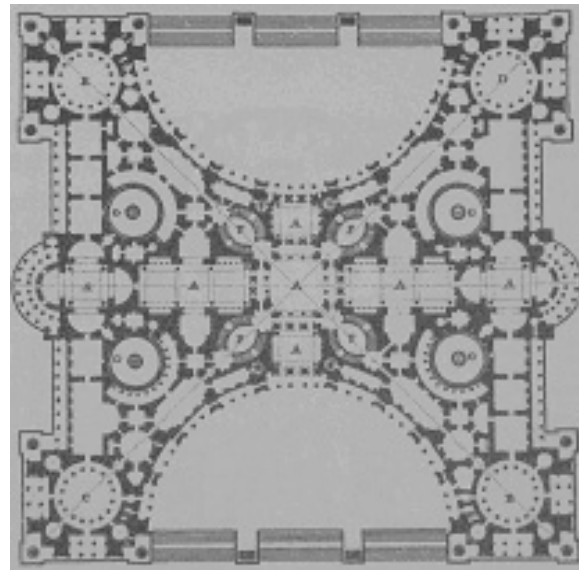


Figure 3.22. Marie-Joseph Peyre, engraved plan of project for an Academy, detail, "Plan d'un bâtiment qui contiendrait les académies," *Oeuvres d'architecture*, 1765

The internal spatial distribution in Peyre's project for an Academy (Fig. 3.22) appears to have been inspired by Piranesi's *Collegio* (Fig. 3.21) and by the younger architect's investigation of Roman baths, particularly evident in the symmetrical

⁴⁴ For information about Académie pensionnaires following Piranesi's style see Murray, *Piranesi and the Grandeur of Ancient Rome*, pp. 30-35. Marie-Joseph Peyre's drawing in Fig. 3.22 was published in his *Oeuvres d'architecture. Nouv. éd., augm. D'un discours sur les monuments des anciens comparés aux nôtres et sur la manière d'employer les colonnes* (1765; Paris: Microéditions Hachette, 1979).

location of the *exedra* and equally inspired by Piranesi.⁴⁵ Similarly, Christadler links the *Carceri* to Piranesi's investigation of Roman thermal architecture.⁴⁶ We ought to recall also that by the eighteenth century, Renaissance architecture itself was object of archaeological interest, both in itself and in terms of the continuities with, and thereby clues to, Antiquity it presented. Thus we may regard the Palladianism of Piranesi's *Collegio* and its revisionistic continuation in Peyre's *Academy* equally part of the archaeological engagement and as an aspect of the influence Piranesi was by this time wielding on younger architects.

Piranesi was interested in young designers, and he often addressed them about the formation of a new architecture. British architects on the Grand Tour too, were impressed by his style. We can mention among them Sir William Chambers (1726-1796), the Adam brothers, Robert Mylne (1734-1811), and George Dance the Younger (1741-1825). One of the most important of these was Robert Adam (1728-1792) who met Piranesi in June 1755. He and his brother James Adam (1730-1794) benefited greatly from Piranesi's ideas and drawings.⁴⁷ While preparing the *Campo*, Piranesi worked on site with Robert Adam. The young architect was by his side as Piranesi examined not only the literary sources concerning the Roman site but also the Severan Plan.⁴⁸ Piranesi also dedicated his drawing series of the *Campo*—generating new ideas seminally for the architecture of posterity—to Robert Adam. The detail of the medallion depicting the adjacency and relationship of Piranesi and Robert Adam demonstrates the persistence with which Piranesi sought to leave his trace on the archaeological architecture of the future (Fig. 3.23). Sir William Chambers' two-volume work, *A Treatise on Civil Architecture* appeared in 1759, after his return to England from Rome in 1755. In it, Chambers confirmed Palladian principles but proposed their application

⁴⁵ Oechslin, "L'intérêt archéologique," p. 409.

⁴⁶ Christadler, "Giovanni Battista Piranesi," p. 78.

⁴⁷ English architects James and Robert Adam were brothers and achieved prominence especially at the end of the eighteenth century. Robert Adam met Piranesi in Rome and studied with him. So the "Adam style," the invention of Robert Adam, bears Piranesian design features and rests on Piranesi's theories, even though the Adam brothers are today classified as Neo-Classical architects. For Adam brothers and their relations with Piranesi see Wilton-Ely, *Mind and Art*, p. 65, 67.

⁴⁸ For information about Severan Plan see p. 48 below.

upon the basis of a two-fold study: the monuments of Roman Antiquity and contemporary Italian architects, foremost among whom was Piranesi.⁴⁹

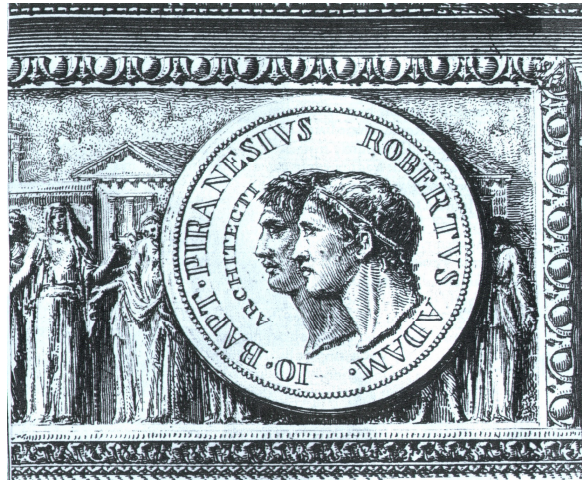


Figure 3.23. Detail of medallion depicting Piranesi and Robert Adam, *Campo*, 1762

This interaction, and to claim that Piranesi bore significant influence on the said architects may come as a surprise since Peyre is known as *the* Parisian Neo-Classicist just as Chambers is known for Neo-Classicism. Both names belonged to the height of eighteenth-century international Neo-Classicism. Piranesi is not generally classified as Neo-Classical. But we must understand that Piranesi's encyclopaedic approach to an archaeological architecture necessarily included Neo-Classicism. Rudolf Wittkower's distinction between Lord Burlington's Palladian classicism that included also other Renaissance architects who derived their work from Antiquity, and eighteenth-century international Neo-Classicism does not quite apply to Piranesi.⁵⁰ Wittkower distinguished the latter group in terms of their empirical approach to Roman monuments. While Piranesi's empirical research would more immediately bring him close to the second group, the first would not be excluded from his domain since Palladio, as we saw, was equally a layer in his archaeologism. Nor was a studied approach to the past, much in the tradition of Renaissance Italian architects starting with

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, ed., *A Documentary History of Art. Volume II: Michelangelo and the Mannerists: The Baroque & the Eighteenth Century* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), pp. 293-94.

⁵⁰ Friedrich Saxl, *British Art and the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 71.

Brunelleschi, a lesser part of his approach than was the empirical. Thus a wide range of orientations, from Le Geay's to Peyre's and Chamber's, could be accommodated in Piranesi's wide perspective.⁵¹

In 1752 Piranesi got married after a five-day acquaintance. As Murray has observed, Piranesi spent his bride's small dowry on copper plates.⁵² From this marriage, he had three children—two sons and one daughter—Francesco (1758-1810), Pietro, and Laura (1755-1785). Again in 1752, one of his greatest achievements, the revised version of the *Varie Vedute* was published with a new title page describing the plates, most of which, as in the earlier edition, were signed by Piranesi.⁵³ Piranesi had begun to establish his own business and career as engraver. Murray's implication in pointing out Piranesi's spending his wife's dowry on plates is that Piranesi married upon such short acquaintance to be able to use his bride's dowry on the copper plates, which would certainly befit the demonic character as discussed in Chapter 2. But one can as easily imagine that Piranesi used the dowry to start a business in order to be able to provide for a growing family. There are numerous items of evidence that this was his intention. To put it summarily, however, suffice it to say that the business of engraving was so closely adopted by the family, that the children not only contributed to it in Piranesi's lifetime, but quite successfully continued it after their father's death.⁵⁴ We have evidence that Francesco Piranesi consulted a professional of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris for suggestions toward securing the inheritance.⁵⁵

Though he had to make a living from it, Piranesi nevertheless wanted to prepare and sell drawings with artistic and intellectual purposes rather than merely commercial ones. In 1753, in order to demonstrate painters, sculptors and architects the fertile

⁵¹ For an opposite view, discussing the 'problem' of mid-century Neo-Classical association with Piranesi, see John Harris, "Le Geay, Piranesi and International Neo-Classicism in Rome, 1740-1750," *Essay in The History of Architecture Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, eds. Douglas Fraser, Howard Hibbard, and Milton J. Lewine (London: Phaidon, 1967), pp. 189-96.

⁵² Murray, *Piranesi and the Grandeur of Ancient Rome*, pp. 30-31, 45.

⁵³ For information about the revised version of *Varie Vedute* see Murray, *Piranesi and the Grandeur of Ancient Rome*, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁴ Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Francesco Piranesi, *Piranesi Vedute e Antichità di Tivoli*, ed. Vincenzo Conti (Rome: V. Conti, 1996).

⁵⁵ Jean Duchesne, *Quelques Idées sur l'Etablissement des Frères Piranesi* (Paris, 1802).

character of Roman architecture, he prepared the *Trofei di Ottaviano Augusto*.⁵⁶ In 1755, he produced a more comprehensive version of this work, the *Antichità*, which comprised four volumes and was published in 1756. *Antichità* bore great importance on account of its drawing technique, archaeological basis and character combining engineering technique with architectural design research. It was his *opus magnum* so far and he too seems to have thought so still in 1762, when he compiled an authoritative list of its contents (Fig. 3.24). Oechslin finds that it surpassed all archaeological work

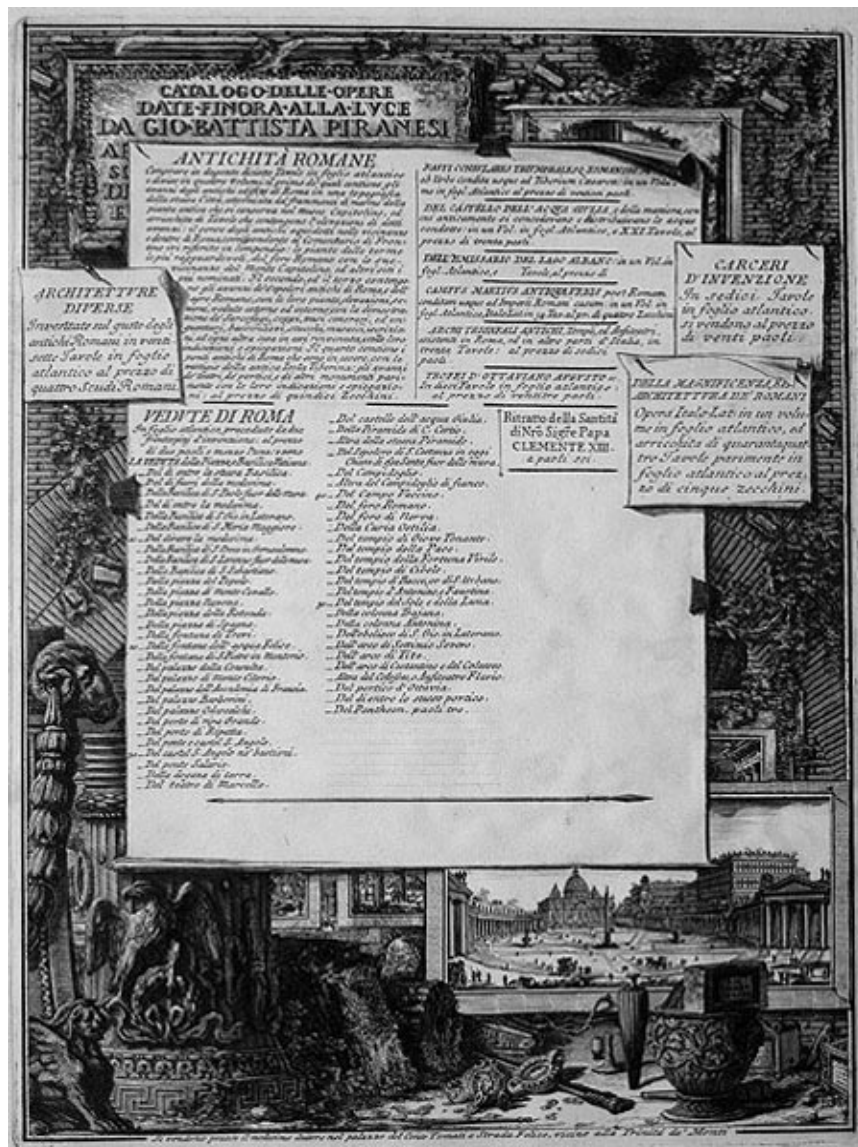


Figure 3.24. *Catalogo delle Opere Date Finora alla Luce da Gio. Battista Piranesi, 1762*

⁵⁶ Piranesi, *Trofei di Ottaviano Augusto Innalzati per la Vittoria ad Actium e Conquista dell'Egitto on vari altri ornamenti diligentemente ricavati dagli avanzi piu' preziosi delle fabbriche antiche di Roma, utili a pittori, scultori ed architetti, designati ed incisi da Giambattista Piranesi, Architetto Veneziano* (Rome: Stamperia di Giovanni Generoso Salomoni, 1753; 1780; Paris: n.p., 1835).

produced in Europe up to that day, even making the emergence of the modern discipline of archaeology.⁵⁷ It indeed evinces an unprecedented attention to detail and concentration on each architectural element and ornament. It constitutes an enormous stride in the history of the technique of the cross-section (Fig. 3.25 and 3.26).⁵⁸

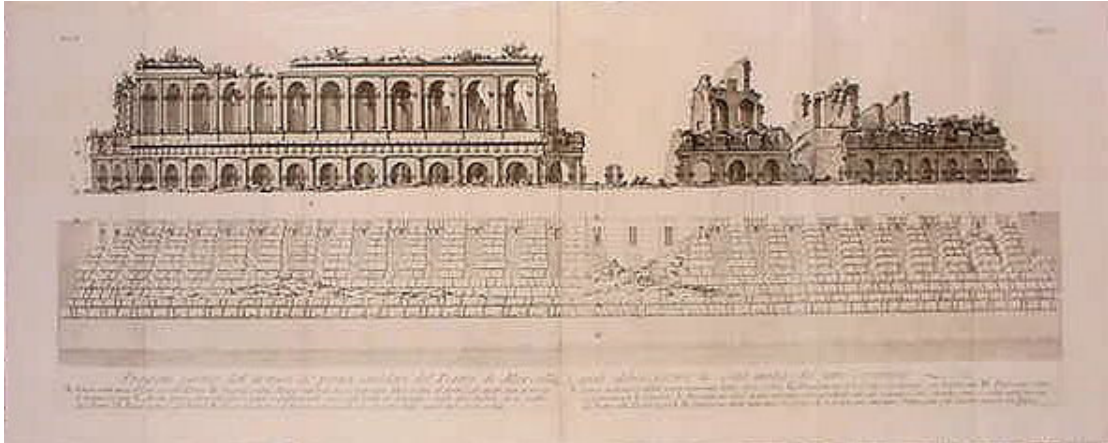


Figure 3.25. *Prospetto esterno dell' avanzo de' portici circolari del Teatro de Marcello, Antichità, IV, 1756*

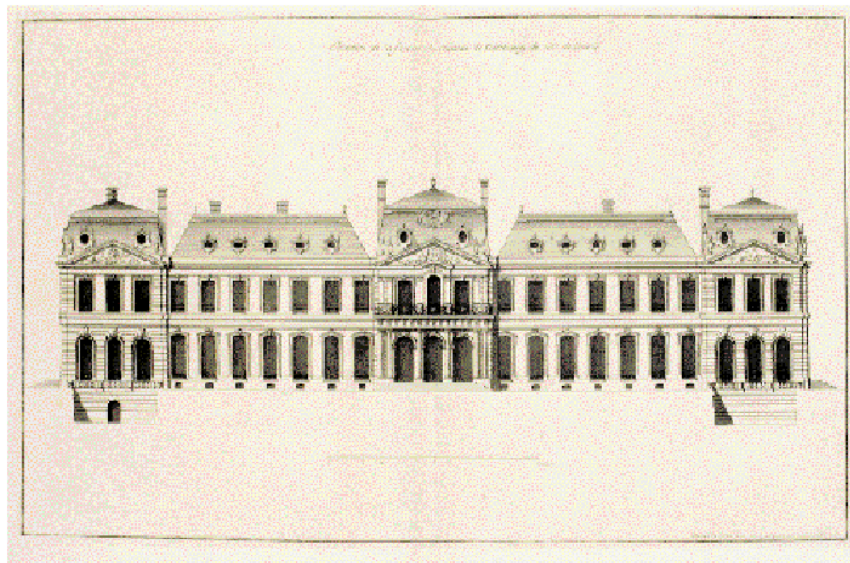


Figure 3.26. Pierre-Jean Mariette, measured drawing from the *L'Architecture française*, 1727

⁵⁷ Oechslin, "L'intérêt archéologique," p. 402.

⁵⁸ Piranesi, *Le antichità romane*; Pierre-Jean Mariette, *L'Architecture française, ou Recueil des plans, elevations, coupes et profils des églises, palais, hôtels & maisons particulières de Paris, & des châteaux & maisons de campagne ou de plaisance des environs, & de plusieurs autres endroits de France, bâtis nouvellement par les plus habils architectes, et levés & mesurés exactement sur les lieux* (Paris: Jean Mariette, 1727).

Antichità is equally held to be the first work since Famiano Nardini (1600- 1661) to propel topographical study,⁵⁹ and utilizes the more recent Giambattista Nolli's (1701-1756) map of Rome published in 1748 (Fig. 3.27), and the publication of the fragments of the *grande pianta marmorea* (grand plan of marble) prepared by Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613-1696) and published in 1673.⁶⁰ *Antichità* also contains a series of plan drawings of Rome. Piranesi drew them by referring to the *Forma Urbis Romae*, known in English as the 'Severan Marble Plan', which is an enormous marble map of ancient Rome (Fig. 3.28). This map had been constructed by the orders of Septimus Severus (146-211). The Severan Plan is an ichnographic plan of ancient Rome, which had been drawn on marble tiles. It dates to the third century A.D. Its fragments were not discovered until the pontificate of Pius IV (1559-1565), when the principles of ichnographic plan were set by Renaissance topographers.⁶¹ Piranesi also referred to this marble plan later, in his *Campo* of 1762. We shall see below, in Chapter 5, Piranesi's defense of his method in the *Campo*. While drawing the city plans in both *Antichità* and *Campo* (Fig. 3.29 and 3.30), he may have utilized from some other master works like Christophorus Cellarius's two-volume *Notitia orbis antiquae* published in Leipzig in 1731.⁶² Since he had apparently been in close enough association with the Lord Charlemont to persuade him to patronize publication of *Antichità*, he may have had occasion to see Cellarius's work available in the Lord's library.⁶³ *Antichità* came in demand of the authorities of the world of art soon upon publication. After this success, Piranesi was elected, on 7 April 1757, to the Honorary Fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries of London. This society harbored archaeologists.

⁵⁹ Oechslin, "L'intérêt archéologique," p. 402; David Ryley Marshall, "Piranesi, Juvarra and the Triumphal Bridge Tradition – Giovanni Piranesi, Filippo Juvarra," *The Art Bulletin* 85: 2 (June 2003): 327. See also Famiano Nardini, *Roma antica* (Rome, 1666).

⁶⁰ Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Fragmenta vestigii veteris Romae ex Lapidibus Farnesianis [...]* (Rome: n.p., 1673); Giambattista Nolli, *La nuova topografia di Roma Comasco* (Rome, 1692-1756). For relations between Piranesi and Nolli, see Ficacci's introduction "The Discovery of Rome out of the Spirit of Piranesi," to *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, pp. 14, 29.

⁶¹ John A. Pinto, "Origins and Development of the Ichnographic City Plan," *Society of Architectural Historians* 33: 1 (March 1970): 35, n.1.

⁶² Christophorus Cellarius, *Notitia orbis antiqui*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Johann Frideric Gleditsch, 1731).

⁶³ The information of that Cellarius' *Notitia orbis antiqui* (in n.62 above) was available in the Lord's library, is reached by the bibliography containing the books listed in the sales catalogue of the Charlemont library in 1865. This bibliography was published in, Paul Johnson, W. B. Stanford and E. J. Finopoulos, *The Travels of Lord Charlemont in Greece and Turkey, 1749* (London: Trigraph, 1984).

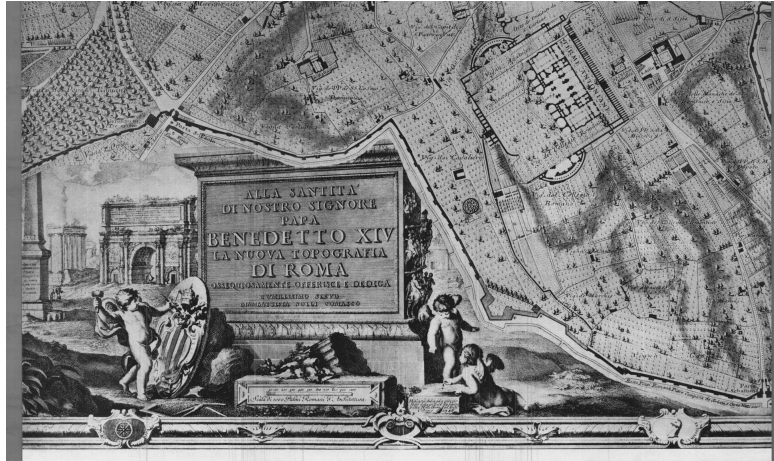


Figure 3.27. Giambattista Nolli, detail from the *La nuova topografia di Roma Comasco*, 1748



Figure 3.28. Severan *Forma Urbis Romae*, a fragment demonstrating part of the Subura, a notorious neighbourhood of imperial Rome

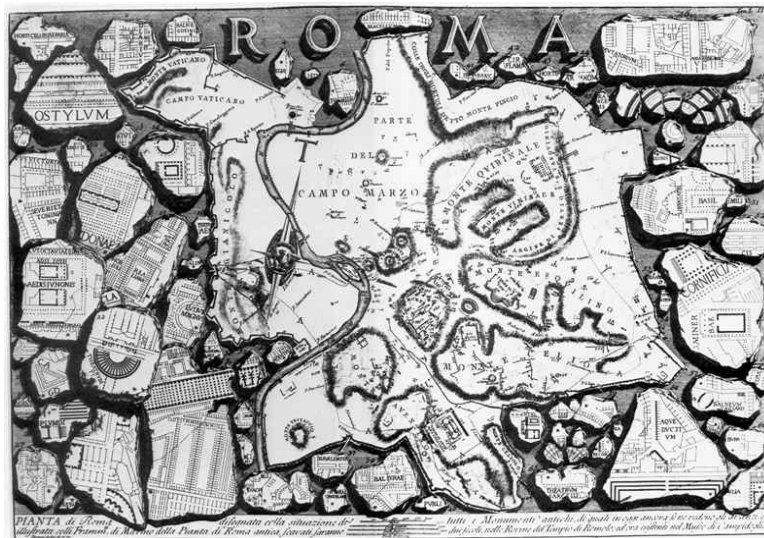


Figure 3.29. Plan of Rome, *Antichità*, I, 1756

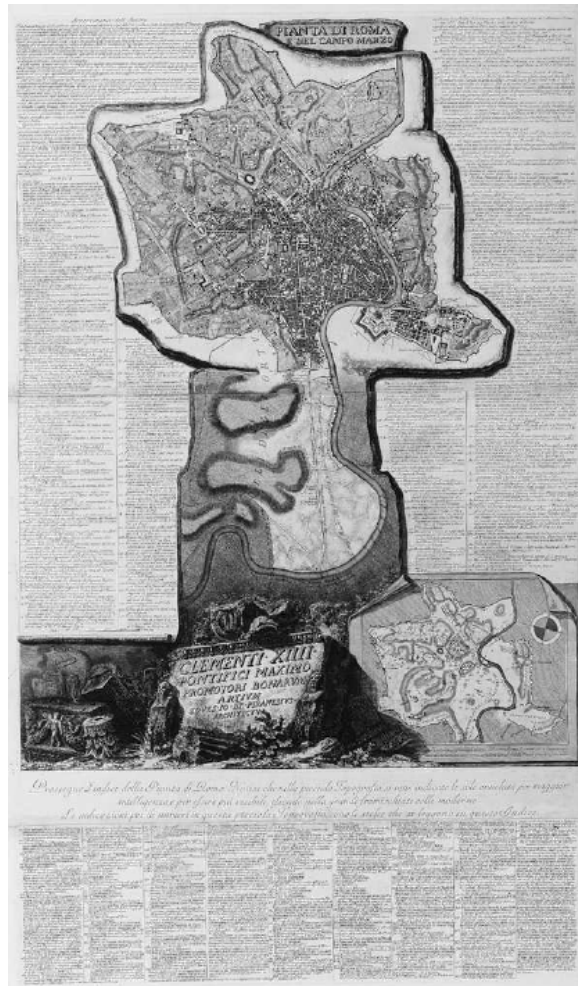


Figure 3.30. Plan of Rome, *Campo*, 1762

The series of the *Antichità* and later, of *Campo* were, therefore, important for Piranesi's career because these plates demonstrated both his scientific knowledge and scientific aim. They equally served as proof of his scientific and philosophical credibility in the field of archaeology. Since he was described as 'idiosyncratic' or as 'mad' rather than an architect, as for example deemed by Vanvitelli,⁶⁴ he might have tried to prove his abilities as an engineer by the help of these drawings showing Rome's engineering magnificence in diverse constructions like aqua-ducts and subterranean structures (Fig. 3.31 and 3.32) with details of their constructional phases and construction devices (Fig. 5.19). It should also be pointed out that Piranesi's tendency toward engineering is not surprising because he was born as the son of a stonemason and master builder. As already stated at the beginning of this chapter, before going to Rome Piranesi was apprenticed to his maternal uncle Lucchesi who was both an

⁶⁴ For Vanvitelli's deem see Chapter 2, p. 20.

architect and hydraulics engineer. These facts clarify how Piranesi's sublime 'fantasies' can at once be eulogies to ancient engineering.

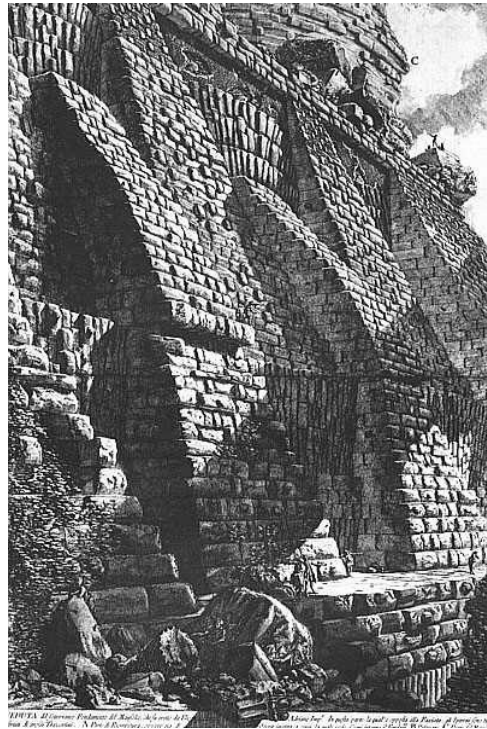


Figure 3.31. Foundations of Hadrian's Mausoleum (later Castel Sant' Angelo), *Antichità*, IV, 1756

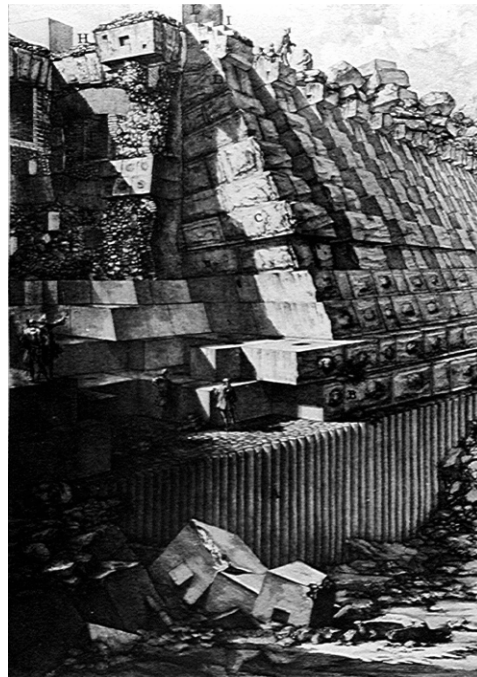


Figure 3.32. Part of the foundations of the theatre of Marcellus, *Antichità*, IV, 1756

As he implied in the above quotation from the *Campo*, both *Antichità* and *Campo* were treatises, actually. Piranesi conducted on-site topographical investigations and utilized the Severan Plan while preparing the plates of the *Campo*. Therefore, one of the most polemical and famous ‘scientific’ works by Piranesi is from the *Campo*, the *Ichnographiam Campi Martii Antiquae Urbis* (1762, Fig. 3.33). It displays the ancient plan of Rome on the basis of Piranesi’s scientific investigation in the field of archaeology. *Ichnographia*’s principal figures consist of imperial baths, the Palatine complex, Hadrian’s villa, reconstructions of Ligorio and Montano.⁶⁵ About the *Ichnographia*, Piranesi claimed that, by using the Severan Marble Plan of Rome as evidence, he had produced a plan which might be the closest to the real plan of ancient Rome.⁶⁶ In the following part of the introduction to the *Campo*, “le quali se taluno confronta coll’antica maniera di architettare, comprenderà, che molto da essa si discostano, e s’avvicinano all’usanza de’ nostri tempi. Ma chiunque egli sia, prima di



Figure 3.33. *Ichnographiam Campi Martii Antiquae Urbis*, *Campo*, 1762

⁶⁵ Alex Krieger, “Between the Crusader’s Jerusalem and Piranesi’s Rome: Conflicting Ideals for the City,” *Modernism and History: Essays in Honor of Eduard F. Sekler* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 156.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of the Severan Marble Plan and *Ichnographia*, see Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, p. 40.

condannare alcuno d'impostura, osservi di grazia l'antica pianta di Roma" wrote Piranesi (*Campo*, xi): "certainly if anyone compares them [parts of the *Campo*] with the architectural theory of the ancients he will see that they differ greatly from it and are actually closer to the usage of our own times. But before any one accuses me of falsehood, he should, I beg, examine the ancient [Marble] plan of the city."

After the achievement of the *Antichità*, he signed the *Lettere di giustificazione scritte a Milord Charlemont e al di lui Agenti di Roma* (1757) by referring to his election to hold Honorary Fellowship at the Society of Antiquaries of London.⁶⁷ The *Lettere* had been prepared because James Caulfield, the First Earl of Charlemont (1728-1799), who was going to patronize publication of the *Antichità*, backed out of his commitment.⁶⁸ The *Lettere* represented Piranesi's complaint of Charlemont in the form of three letters. The recipients of the *Lettere* were not known until about forty years ago, when the sheet containing their names was discovered.⁶⁹ Some of the names on the list remain undeciphered because Piranesi noted only surnames and his spelling was casual (Fig. 3.34 shows *Lapide del primo frontespizio* and facing page with the list indicating intended recipients of the *Lettere*).

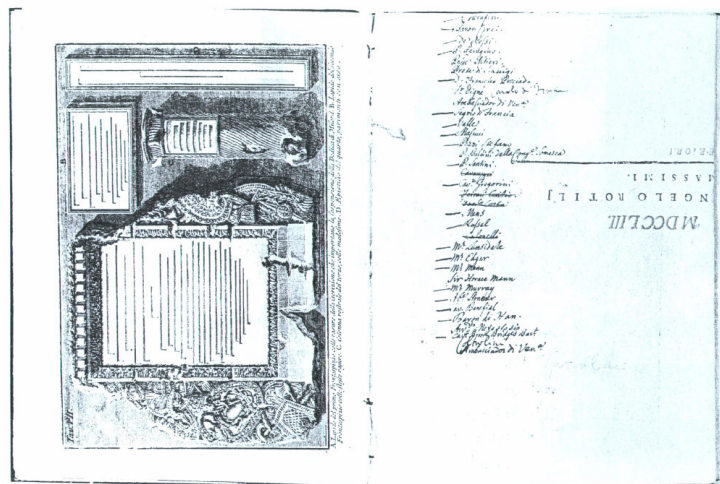


Figure 3.34. Plate VII (*Lapide del primo frontespizio*) on the left, and facing page on the right, *Lettere di giustificazione scritte a milord Charlemont*, first edition, 1757

⁶⁷ Piranesi, *Lettere di Giustificazione scritte a Milord Charlemont e a' di lui Agenti* (Rome: n.p., 1757).

⁶⁸ On the Piranesi-Lord Charlemont relationship, see Lamberto Donati, "Giovan Battista Piranesi e Lord Charlemont," *English Miscellany* (Rome, 1950), pp. 231-42.

⁶⁹ For this information see Donati, "Giovan Battista Piranesi," pp. 231-42, and Smith College Museum of Art's exhibition catalogue, *Piranesi*, pp. 65-66n.176.

Recipients ranged from the Pope to patrons, connoisseurs, and Piranesi's colleagues:

Andrea Rossi, Venetian etcher and engraver
Perugini, Milanese painter of ruins and landscape
Francisco Preciado de la Vego, Spanish-born painter and seller of art books
A *Principe* of the Academy of St. Luke and Director of the Academy of St. Ferdinand
Filippo della Valle, prominent Roman sculptor and engraver
Agostino Masucci, Roman sculptor who was active in the Academy St. Luke, or his son,
the painter Lorenzo
Stefano Pozzi, painter and Agostino Masucci's pupil
Cavaceppi (the name crossed out), Roman sculptor, restorer and dealer in antiquities
Raphael Mengs, painter and important follower of Neo-Classicism
John Russel, English painter and guide for tourists in Rome
Cavaliere Domenico Gregorini, Roman architect
Mann, nephew of Sir Horace Mann, British envoy to Florence
Sir Horace Mann, Florentine artist
David Murray, second Earl of Mansfield, diplomat and statesman
Cavaliere Marco Benefiale, Roman painter
Sir William Hamilton, archaeologist and collector of antiquities while British envoy in Naples
Sir Brook Bridges, a member of Sir Horace Mann's circle
Some members of Roman aristocracy
A priest at San Luigi, probably at San Luigi dei Francesi (the French national church in Rome)
A Venetian Ambassador (named twice)
A Secretary of France
Metastasio, an advocate

Here, Piranesi has made a mailing list including such diverse names that it reveals that Piranesi's intention for publishing *Antichità* was to demonstrate the engineering magnificence of the past for archaeologists and to inspire new design principles for contemporary architects. Piranesi was also establishing himself in an academic career of sorts. The *Lettere* were sent to persons relevant to this purpose. This list continues further.⁷⁰ It is important to look at the message Piranesi sent by the *Lettere* as above all it indicates consciousness of the importance of *Antichità* and awareness, as indicated especially in the last sentence, of leaving a legacy to posterity:

⁷⁰ For the list given above see the exhibition catalogue, Smith College Museum of Art, *Piranesi*, pp. 65-66n.176.

I believe that I have completed a work which will pass on to posterity and which will endure so long as there are men curious to know the ruins which remain of the most famous city in the universe [...] This work is not of the kind which remains in the buried crowded shelves of libraries. Its four folio volumes comprise a new system of the monuments of ancient Rome. It will be deposited in many public libraries throughout Europe, and in particular in that of the Most Christian King. And there is reason to suppose that the name of its author will pass on to posterity together with his work [...] Is it not a very unpleasant circumstance, then, that having invested my thoughts, talents, work, and purse, that having laboured unceasingly for eight years to make this work worthy of Your Lordship, I should now be insulted? [...] The time has come, therefore, to think of saving my honour. Should I be forced to suppress the Dedication, I beg your Lordship not to take this as an offense against your forebears, but as a reparation which is owed to me. For when the story of my life is written, along with that of other artists, I do not want to stand accused of having been a flatterer [...] who was held in low esteem even by those on whom he lavished his praise. If Your Lordship do not loosen my tongue, if you do not render me justice and protect me against calumny [...] then I cannot, as a man of honour, or without making myself ridiculous, call you a protector of the arts and myself an artist who received your protection. And if I have seemed to call you so, in the seventy copies of my work which have already been sold, then I must face the painful necessity of having to accuse my own foolishness and of trying to vindicate myself before the world. For I must ask you to bear in mind that, as a nobleman must consider his ancestors, an artist who will leave his name to posterity must consider his own reputation and that of his descendants. A nobleman is the latest of his name, an artist the first of his; both must act with equal delicacy.⁷¹

In 1761 he published *Della magnificenza ed architettura de' romani* under the patronage of Pope Clement XIII.⁷² Like the *Lettere*, *Della magnificenza* compelled Piranesi to produce a defense: this time one addressed to Pierre-Jean Mariette (1694-1774) who had criticized Piranesi in his letter published in the *Gazette litteraire de l'Europe* in 1764, on the basis of his *Della magnificenza*. *Della magnificenza* is Piranesi's greatest work considering the number of pages containing text (199 pages). It has also a drawing part comprising 46 plates. Piranesi explored the origins of Roman architecture in this work: in it, he expounded his great argument that Roman architecture derived not from the Greek but from Etruscan by indicating the accordance between Etruscans' and Romans' intellectual, artistic and functional masterpieces in architecture (Fig. 3.35). Piranesi further disproved the thesis by Laugier—who used the rustic as proof for the evolution from wooden to stone architecture—by offering the Tuscan order as the source of Roman Doric. He rejected Le Roy's arguments by drawing a plate (Fig. 3.36): he juxtaposed Le Roy's engravings, cited the latter's words, and placed under these words the Mouth of Truth which in ancient Rome was believed to bite the hand of liars. Piranesi's plate was headed by the title of Le Roy's book, *Les*

⁷¹ See Piranesi, *Lettere*. Translation of Piranesi's original words was quoted from Lorenz Eitner, *Neoclassicism and Romanticism 1750-1850: Sources and Documents* (London, 1971), p. 106.

⁷² Piranesi, *Della magnificenza ed architettura de' romani opera di Gio Battista Piranesi socio della reale accademia degli antiquari di Londra* (Rome: n.p., 1761).

ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce: The ruins of the most beautiful monuments of Greece.⁷³ The quotation he included from Le Roy was: “Chapiteau ionique: dont on n’a eu jusqu’ici aucune idée et supérieur à plusieurs égards aux plus beaux chapiteaux de cet ordre”: Ionic capital: which, one did not have up to now any idea is higher in several ways than the most beautiful capitals of this order. After the



Figure 3.35. View and sectional detail of the Cloaca Maxima, *Della magnificenza*, 1761

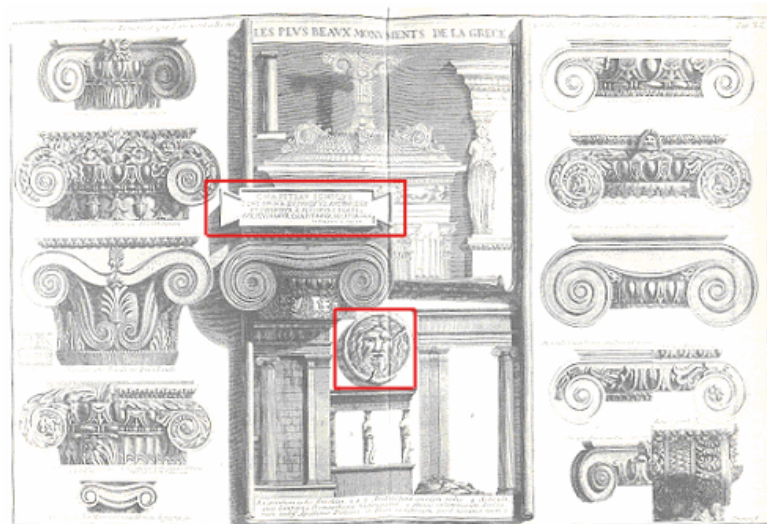


Figure 3.36. Roman and Greek Ionic capitals, *Le Roy’s words* (upper inserted frame) and *The Mouth of Truth* (lower inserted frame), *Della magnificenza*, 1761

⁷³ Julien-David Le Roy, *Les ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* (Paris: H. L. Guerin & L. F. Delatour, 1758).

publication of the *Della magnificenza*, Mariette's letter reviewing this work appeared in the *Gazette litteraire de l'Europe*, as already mentioned. Mariette was criticizing Piranesi, since, according to him, Piranesi ignored and denied the Grecian roots of Roman architecture. As a reply to Mariette, Piranesi prepared the *Osservazioni sopra la lettre de Monsieur Mariette* published as bounded with his *Parere* and *Della introduzione e del progresso delle belle arti in Europa ne' tempi antichi* in 1765, and sentence by sentence responded to Mariette's letter.⁷⁴ It is worth quoting here the introduction part of this text. The passage below also reproduces the form of scrupulous response Piranesi invented. The marks A, B, etc. indicate the points to which Piranesi formed his response. Piranesi is referring to himself in the third person:

Monsieur Mariette's Letter

Dear Messieurs, Monsieur Piranesi, the author of a number of works on Roman antiquities that have been reviewed in your pages, has recently published another [*Della magnificenza*], which may perhaps be unknown to us,^A in which he sets out to write a defense of the Romans and to show—contrary to your opinion, which I share—that in the arts, and in architecture in particular, not only does that nation owe nothing to the Greeks^B but also it is greatly superior to them by virtue of the solidity, the size, and the magnificence of the buildings that formerly adorned its capital city.

Observations

A

To Signor Mariette this work is unknown, no *perhaps* about it.

B

To my mind, there is a difference between saying *As far as architecture is concerned, the Romans owe nothing to the Greeks* and saying, as one reads in Piranesi's preface to the published edition of his work, *In the matter of architecture, the Romans owed little or nothing to the Greeks*. Italians understand that the phrase *poco o nulla* [little or nothing] is intended to belittle the nature of the debt incurred by the Romans, not to deny that there was any such debt; anyone who has read Piranesi's book knows whether this is true. On page 93 he demonstrates that Greek architecture conferred no advantage, public or private, on Rome, which had long taken its lead from Etruscan architecture; and that Greek architecture had been preferred to Etruscan not on merit but out of caprice. There is the *little or nothing* that came to Rome from Greece.⁷⁵

Thus responding in detail to Mariette's letter, Piranesi went further and prepared a plate for the title page of the *Osservazioni* referring to Mariette's letter: he quoted a fragment

⁷⁴ Piranesi, *Osservazioni di Gio Battista Piranesi sopra la lettre de M. Mariette aux auteurs de la Gazette Litteraire de l'Europe. Inserita nel Supplemento dell'istessa Gazzetta stampata Dimanche 4 Novembre MDCCLIV. E Parere su l'Architettura, con una Prefazione ad un nuovo trattato della introduzione e del progresso delle belle arti in Europa ne' tempi antichi* (Rome: n.p., 1765).

⁷⁵ Piranesi, "Osservazioni sopra la lettre de Monsieur Mariette," in *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, pp. 87. For the whole text see pp. 87-101.

of Mariette's words and depicted them being written by Mariette's hand which was, however, bitten off—probably by the Mouth of Truth (Fig. 3.37).

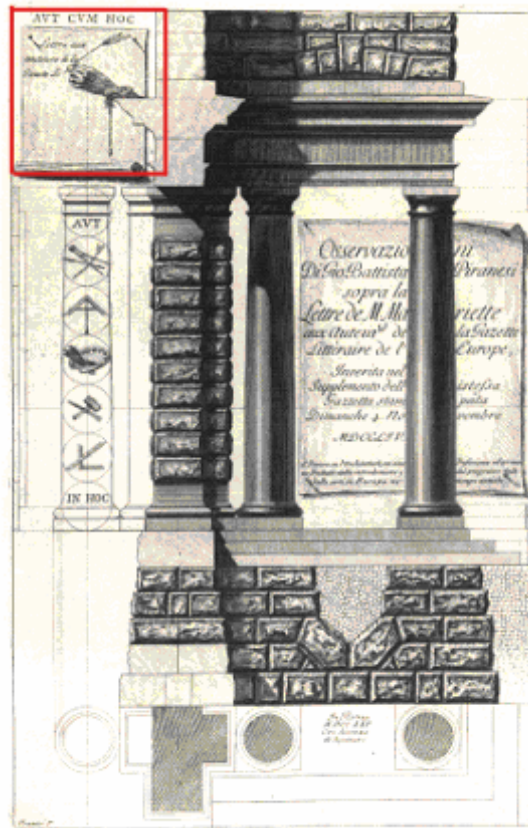


Figure 3.37. Title page (inserted frame depicts Mariette's hand), *Osservazioni*, 1765

Parere is the other part of this work of 1765. It comprises a dialogue between two imaginary characters called Protopiro and Didascalò by Piranesi. While Protopiro represents a scholar from the philhellenic environment, Didascalò conveys Piranesi's ideas and new design philosophy.⁷⁶ The last section of the volume consists of the *Belle arti* bounded with the *Parere* and *Osservazioni*. Like the *Della magnificenza*, *Belle arti* too, discusses the theme of the Etruscan origins of Roman civilization, but this time by including and referring to the progress of European art and architecture.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Longer discussion of *Parere* and conjectures of whom Protopiro and Didascalò represent will follow in Chapter 5 below.

⁷⁷ For the whole text of *Belle arti in Europa* see Piranesi, "Della introduzione e del progresso delle belle arti in Europa ne' tempi antichi," in *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, pp. 115-24.

Furthermore, Piranesi produced for the volume three series composed of drawings of the remains at Albano. One of them, entitled *Descrizione e disegno dell'emissario del Lago Albano di Gio. Battista Piranesi*, was published in 1762; the other two series, entitled *Antichità d'Albano e di Castel Gandolfo Descritte ed incise da Giovambattista Piranesi* and *Di due Spelonche Ornate Dagli Antichi alla Riva del Lago Albano*, were published in 1764.⁷⁸ The Albano series bear features as scientific as *Antichità*, and reflect Piranesi's archaeological sensibility. While the *Emissario* comprises the drawings of drainage outlets to Lake Albano and conveys Piranesi's painstaking labor for the site investigations which resulted in the technical diagrams (Fig. 3.38), the *Antichità d'Albano* contains drawings recalling the *Carceri* series by their etching technique and atmosphere (Fig. 3.39 and 3.40), aside from those again representing Piranesi's technical character of archaeological identity (Fig. 3.41 and 3.42). The *Spelonche*, on the other hand, differs from the other two series in that it also contains an elaborate text bounded with the drawings (Fig. 3.43). Aside from an introductory text that conveys all historically known facts and uses of the lake and aqueduct in Piranesi's time, including quotations and documentation of ancient and modern works in footnotes, Piranesi has written detailed explanations for each of eight plates out of a numbered total of twelve. But there are more than twelve plates in the volume. The plates with commentary comprise technical drawings such as ground plans, sections, stylistic and constructional details. Plates IX-XII carry commentary inscribed in them, and also comprise technical drawing or depict the structures of the site—towns like Albano Laziale; Castel Gandolfo, the pontifical summer residence; and aqueduct—in their environmental totality. The rest are 'close-up shots' of the inner reaches of the aqueduct, presented—naturally—in *Carceri*-like fashion: dark and grotto-like, for they *are* underground reservoirs.

While obviously the three series are important especially on account of the technical sophistication of their drawings, they equally reverberate Piranesi's stance on architectural history and perhaps a bit of national history: the Lago Albano was held by Etruscans, upon which the seer at Delphi pronounced that it would be captured when the lake water reached the sea. The 180-meter deep lake, at a height of 293 meters, with a

⁷⁸ Piranesi, *Descrizione e disegno dell'emissario del Lago Albano di Gio. Battista Piranesi* (Rome: n.p., 1762); Piranesi, *Antichità d'Albano e di Castel Gandolfo Descritte ed incise da Giovambattista Piranesi* (Rome: n.p., 1764); Piranesi, *Di due Spelonche Ornate Dagli Antichi alla Riva del Lago Albano* (Rome: n.p., 1764; Paris: n.p., 1836).

surface area of 5 km² is said thus to have acquired an aqueduct in 398-397 BC. Piranesi was perhaps investigating an Etruscan site. Piranesi summarized the characteristics of these three disciplines—archaeology, architecture and history—by giving a snapshot view by the drawings of these three series.

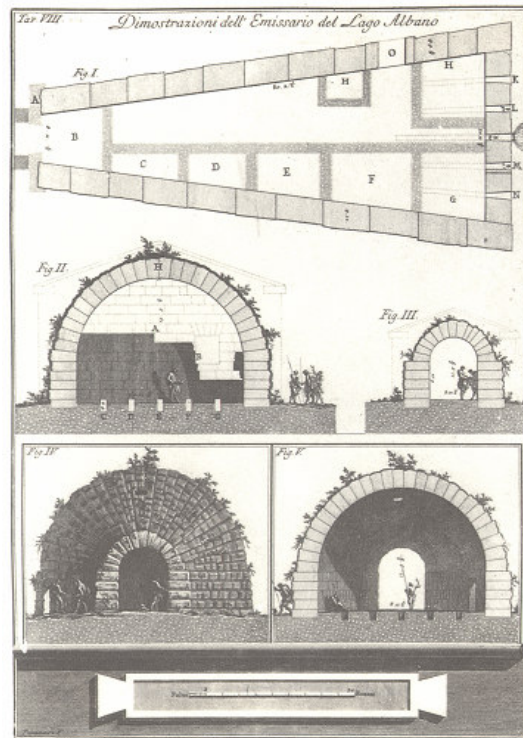


Figure 3.38. *Dimastrazioni dell' Emissario del Lago Albano, Emissario, 1762*



Figure 3.39. *Veduta laterale dello stesso Sepolcro, Antichità d'Albano, 1764*

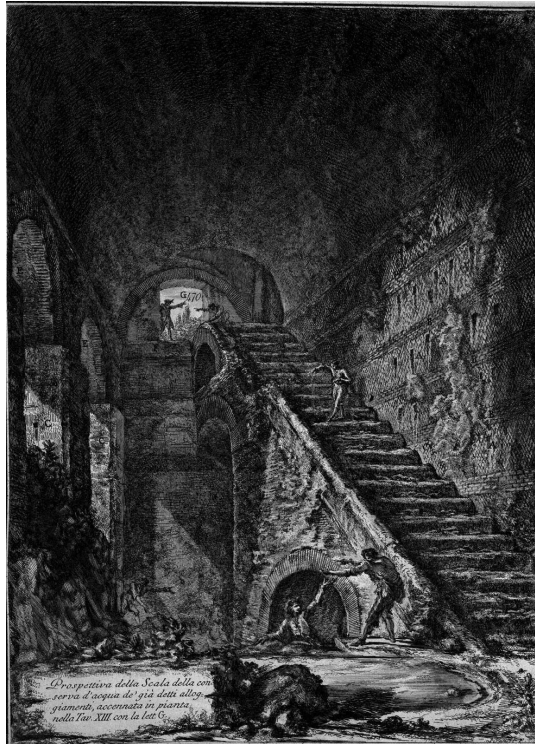


Figure 3.40. Prospettiva della scala della stessa conserva d'acqua, Antichità d'Albano, 1764

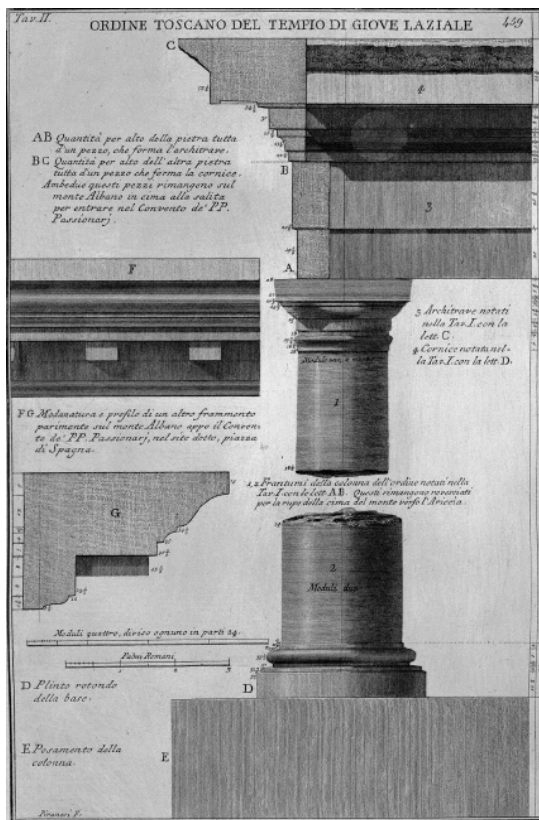


Figure 3.41. Ordine Toscano del Tempio di Giove Laziale, Antichità d'Albano, 1764

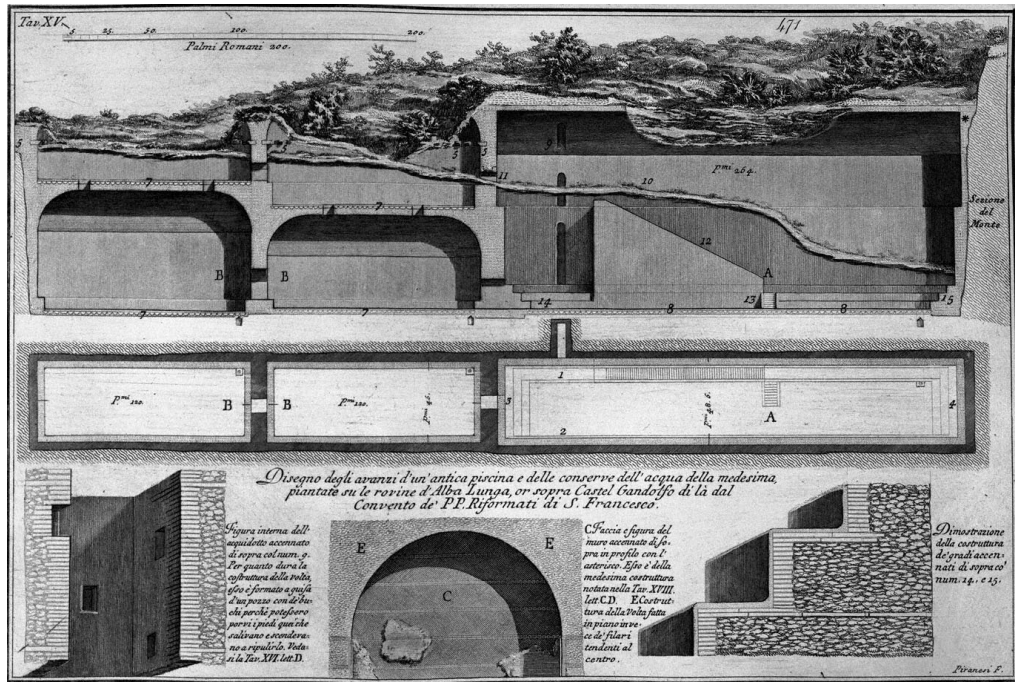


Figure 3.42. Disegno degli avanzi d'un'antica piscina e delle conserve dell'acqua della medesima, piantate su le rovine d'Alba Lunga, or sopra Castel Gandolfo di là dal Convento de' PP. Riformati di San Francesco, Antichità d'Albano, 1764

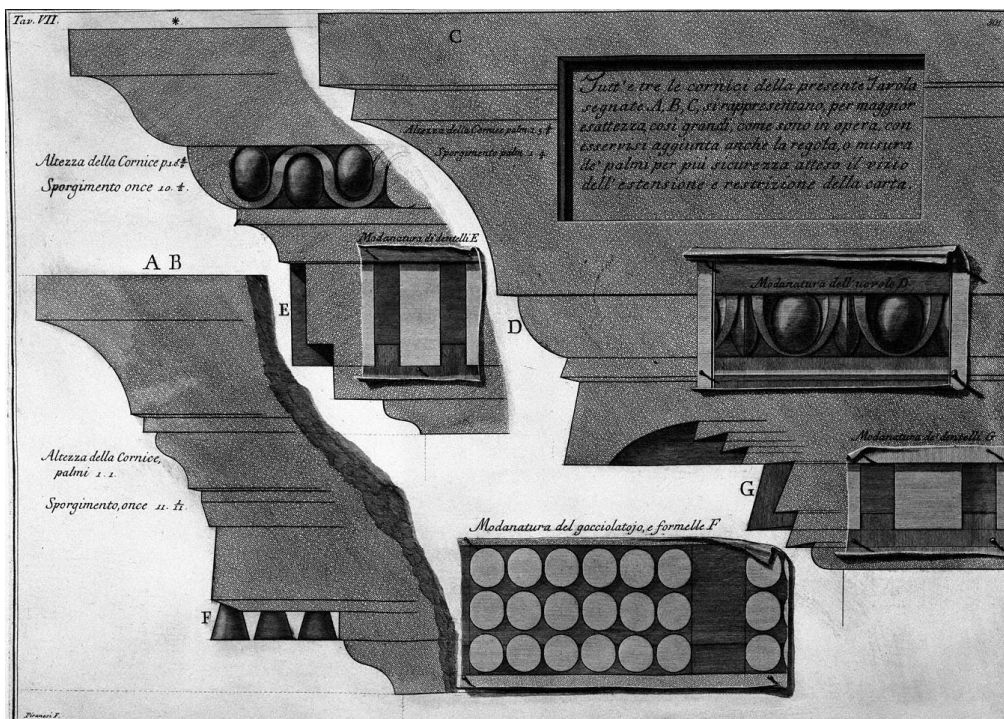


Figure 3.43. Dimostrazione in grande del criptoporch accennato nella tav. 9 con la lettera C, Spelonche, 1764

Piranesi's architectural projects—and the process of their execution or non-execution—were important for his career. In 1764, Piranesi was appointed by the Grand Prior Giambattista Rezzonico, Pope Clement XIII's then 23-year-old nephew, to design two major architectural projects:⁷⁹ the reconstruction of *Santa Maria del Priorato* on the Aventine hill, and a new tribune for the west end of *San Giovanni in Laterano* (St John Lateran). The operation in Laterano was to complete the program of renovation begun in the 1640s by Francesco Borromini (1599-1667) on the nave. The Laterano project had continued into the eighteenth century with work on the façade done by Gaetano Galilei (1691-1737) who had redesigned the façade of the Laterano in 1719.⁸⁰ Finally, Piranesi was appointed to work on the west end design of the Laterano, after Galilei. Piranesi designed and drew the architectural project for the said part of the building. Fig. 3.44 depicts the longitudinal section of the apse of the Laterano. Nevertheless, the work could never be realized because of lack of funds.

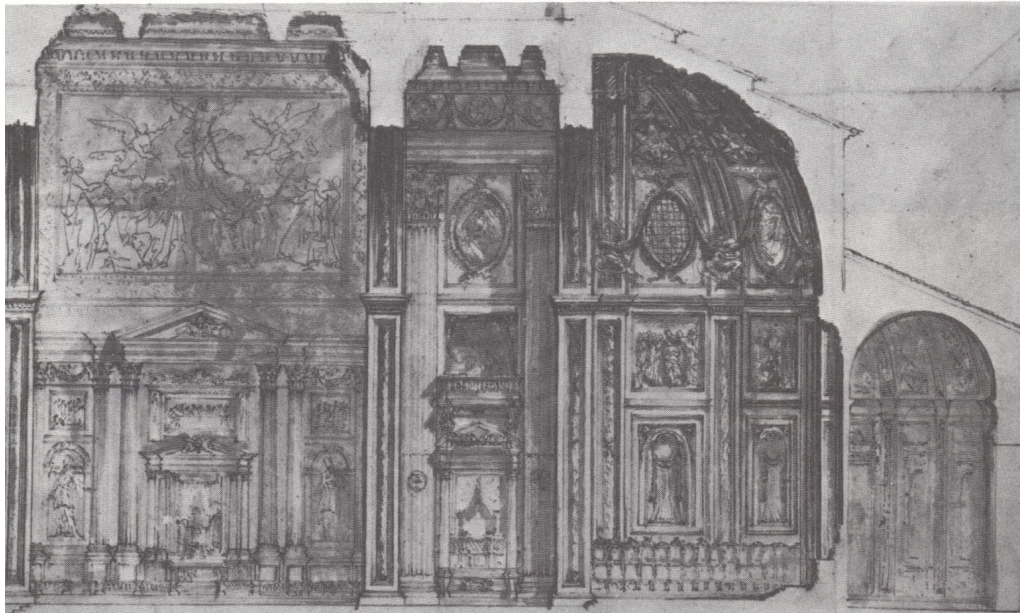


Figure 3.44. Preliminary study for a longitudinal section from the apse of San Giovanni in Laterano, Plate III, 1765

⁷⁹ For information about Piranesi's assignment to two architectural projects see Ficacci's introduction "The Discovery of Rome out of the Spirit of Piranesi," to *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, p. 35.

⁸⁰ For Galilei's design in Laterano see James Stevens Curl, "Galilei," *A Dictionary of Architecture*, 1999 ed.

Priorato belonged to the Priory of the Knights of Malta.⁸¹ The project was assigned to Piranesi in 1764, construction started in 1765 on the site of the older church of the Priory, and was completed in 1766. The reconstruction process of the Priorato primarily consisted of a new entrance screen and an interior ceremonial piazza.⁸² Moreover, because Priorato and Laterano were designed almost at the same time, when he was designing Priorato, he may have also been influenced by Borromini's design in Laterano.⁸³ Piranesi's conception provides integration of the building with the site.⁸⁴ The altar also includes the sculpture of *The Apotheosis of St Basil of Cappadocia* (Fig. 3.45). The basic form of the altarpiece is a sphere mounted upon a richly elaborated



Figure 3.45. Sketch study for the altar of *The Apotheosis of St Basil of Cappadocia* in Santa Maria del Priorato

⁸¹ The first church had been built in 939 as a Benedictine monastery, when the Marquis of Camerino, Alberico II (?-955), donated his palace to St Odo of Cluny. In the plan of Santa Maria del Priorato, there may be inspirations from the Benedictine Monastery of St Gall, which was constructed in 820, in Switzerland. Because of that the plan of St Gall is similar to some of the later churches (St Gall still survives and reflects the sophisticated architectural conception of the Benedictines). After the Benedictines, the church passed to the Templars in the mid-twelfth century, and to the Knights of Malta in the fifteenth century. It belonged to an important Cluniac foundation between the tenth and twelfth centuries. See Henry J. A. Sire, *The Knights of Malta* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 171, 250, 275; Curl, "Benedictine," *A Dictionary of Architecture*, 1999 ed.

⁸² In this piazza, an ancient ceremony takes place annually: the weapons and equipment of the Roman army were ritually purified at the close of the summer campaign. See Sire, *The Knights of Malta*, p. 275.

⁸³ For Wilton-Ely's interpretation of Borrominian influence in Piranesi's Priorato see Wilton-Ely, *Mind and Art*, p. 97.

⁸⁴ Tafuri also observes the continuity between Priorato's and the piazza's design in *Sphere and Labyrinth*, p. 48.

pedestal topped by the spectral appearance of the main figure—in this case Saint Basil. Heinrich Brauer argues that Piranesi’s Priorato altarpiece derives from drawings he had done starting some twenty years before for a triumphal monument.⁸⁵ The three drawings date to 1745-1753 and are in Berlin’s Kunstbibliothek (Fig. 3.46, 3.47, and 3.48). One recognizes in Fig. 3.45 also the form which occupied Piranesi as he worked on the *cammini* (chimneys) that were going to be published in 1769 in the *Diverse maniere*. In fact, Brauer points out that the sheet containing the drawings in Fig. 3.46, 3.47 and 3.48 also contains a chimney sketch.⁸⁶ We can extend the conjunction to draw an analogy between the *cammini* of *Diverse maniere* and the façade of the wall in Priorato’s piazza (Fig. 3.49 and 3.50).



Figure 3.46. *Fides* (faith, the goddess of loyalty)

⁸⁵ Heinrich Brauer, “Gio. Batt. Piranesi verwirklicht einen Traum: Eine Zeichnung zum St. Basilius-Altar in Sta. Maria del Priorato,” *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Hertzianae zu Ehren von Leo Bruhns, Franz Graf Wolff Matternich, Ludwig Schudt* (Munich: Verlag Anton Schroll, 1961), p. 474.

⁸⁶ Brauer, “Gio. Batt. Piranesi verwirklicht einen Traum,” p. 477.



Figure 3.47. *Religion*



Figure 3.48. *Fides* (faith, the goddess of loyalty)

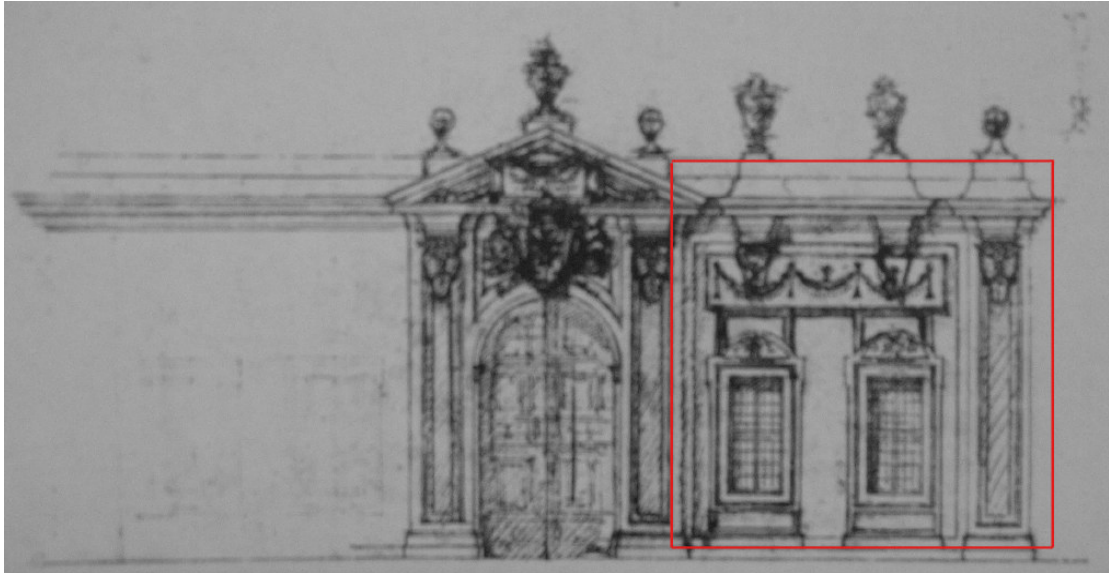


Figure 3.49. Preliminary design for the screen wall of Priorato's piazza (framed part refers to the chimneypiece from the *Diverse maniere*)

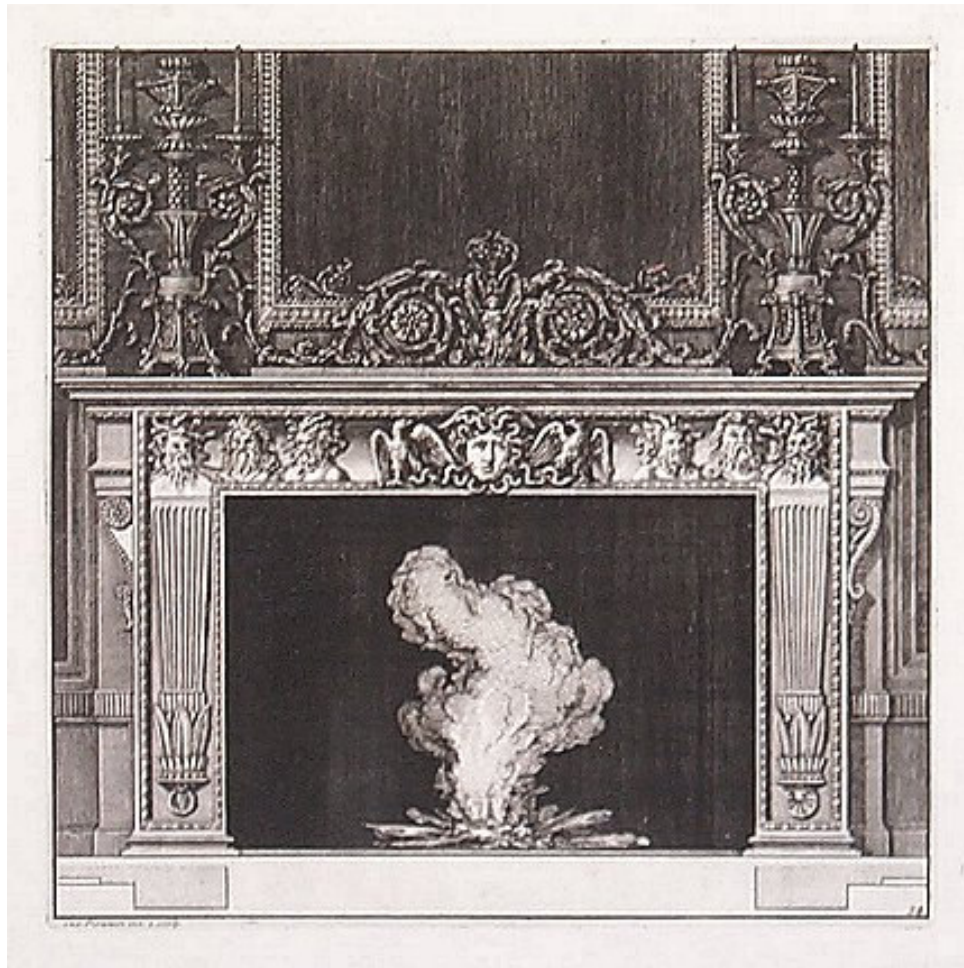


Figure 3.50. Plate 34, *Diverse maniere*, 1769

Most Piranesi critics maintain that Priorato's importance for Piranesi is that it is the only large architectural project of his that was executed (Fig. 3.51).⁸⁷ The construction process of Priorato is extremely well documented; we even still have the foreman's account book.⁸⁸ Because of Piranesi's successful design in the Priorato, Pope Clement XIII endowed him with *Sperone d'Oro* (Golden Spur).

⁸⁷ Brauer, however, maintains that Piranesi early on deliberately withdrew from pursuit of architectural practice: "Gio. Batt. Piranesi verwirklicht einen Traum," p. 474.

⁸⁸ Piranesi's manuscript account book recording construction costs for Piranesi's redesign of the church of Santa Maria del Priorato is in the art and architecture collections of the Avery Fisher Architectural and Fine Arts Library of Columbia University.

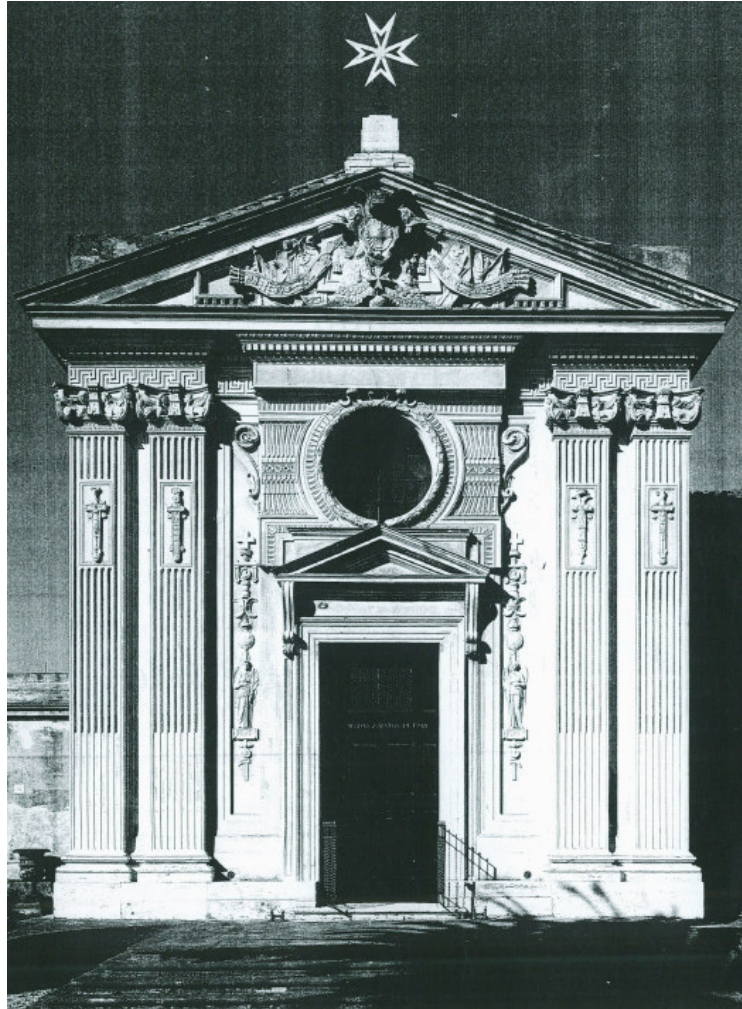


Figure 3.51. View from the entrance façade of the Santa Maria del Priorato, Rome, 1764-66

When they mention Piranesi's architectural designs, Piranesi scholars also speak of Piranesi's probable design for Cardinal Alessandro Albani's villa, as one of the important places in Rome of Piranesi's day. It is situated on the Via Salaria and was designed by Carlo Marchionni (1702-1786) around 1760 with philhellenic design intention (Fig. 3.52). It was to reflect the principles of Greek temples. Villa Albani was famous for its ceiling representing *Parnassus* painted by Anton Raphael Mengs. Piranesi's contribution to the design of Villa Albani is mentioned in works on Piranesi.⁸⁹ However, we do not know the extent of his contribution to the actualized design.

⁸⁹ Piranesi's contribution to the design of Villa Albani is mentioned in Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, pp. 37-38. Also see Rykwert, *First Moderns*, pp. 342-55; Lesley Lawrence, *Connoisseurs and Secret Agents in 18th Century Rome* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961).

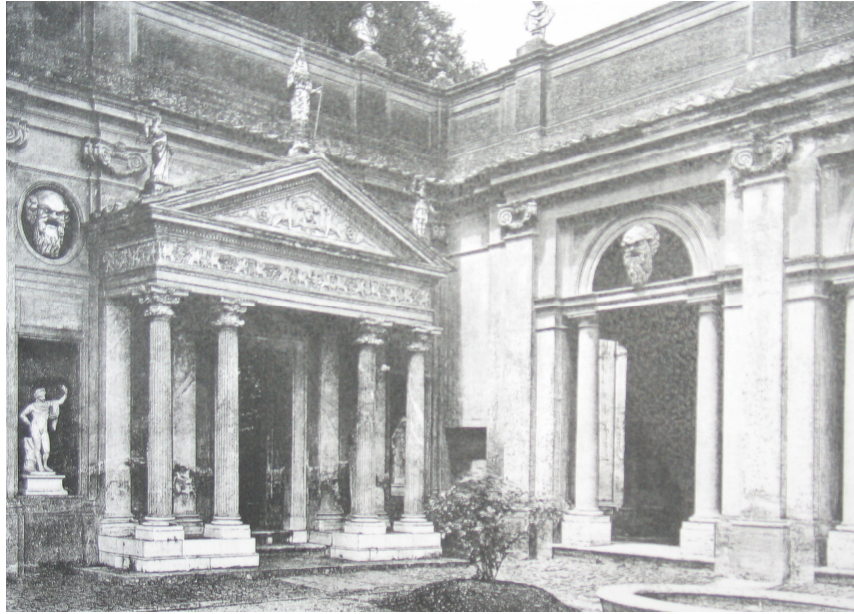


Figure 3.52. Carlo Marchionni, *Tempietto Greco*, Villa Albani, Rome, 1760

In 1765, Piranesi was invited to the archaeological excavations operated by the English merchant Thomas Jenkins in Chiusi and Corneto: he participated in the investigations in Corneto with his friend James Byres and examined the Etruscan tombs there. In 1778, he drew the Doric temples at Paestum in Naples,⁹⁰ and they were published posthumously by his son Francesco as a series under the title of the *Varie Vedute di Paestum*.⁹¹ The *Paestum* series may also have been prepared by the help of documents collected when Piranesi journeyed south to Naples, before returning to Venice in 1744. Apart from comprising his last drawings, the importance of the *Paestum* series also owes to the fact that, by these drawings, Piranesi for a last time demonstrated his views on the origins of architecture.

In his last years Piranesi worked more on interior space than on *vedute*. His *Diverse maniere* contains chimneypiece designs some of which were executed while others remained as drawings. Their styles bring together elements of Etruscan and Egyptian ornamentation. The plates in the *Diverse maniere* did not, however, become popular when they were produced: the work was sold at the low price of about sixty

⁹⁰ Lang, S., "The Early Publications of the Temples at Paestum," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13: 1/2 (1950): 48-64.

⁹¹ Piranesi, *Differentes vues de quelques restes de trois grands édifices qui subsistent encore dans le milieu de l'Ancienne Ville de Pesto, autrement Possidonia, etc.* [*Varie Vedute di Paestum*] (Rome: n.p., 1778; Paris: n.p., 1836).

New Turkish Liras.⁹² The references to Egypt can also be found in his painted scheme of the Caffé degli Inglesi in Piazza di Spagna. The project of the Caffé was executed probably during the early 1760s. There are two plates, published in the *Diverse maniere*, demonstrating his design for the Caffé, for its short and long walls (Fig. 3.53 and 3.54). Interpretations of the design of the Caffé came already in Piranesi's day. One of them was from the young Welsh painter Thomas Jones in 1776: “[the Caffé was] a filthy vaulted room the walls of which were painted with sphinxes, obelisks and pyramids from capricious designs of Piranesi, and fitter to adorn the inside of an Egyptian sepulcher, than a room of social conversation.”⁹³

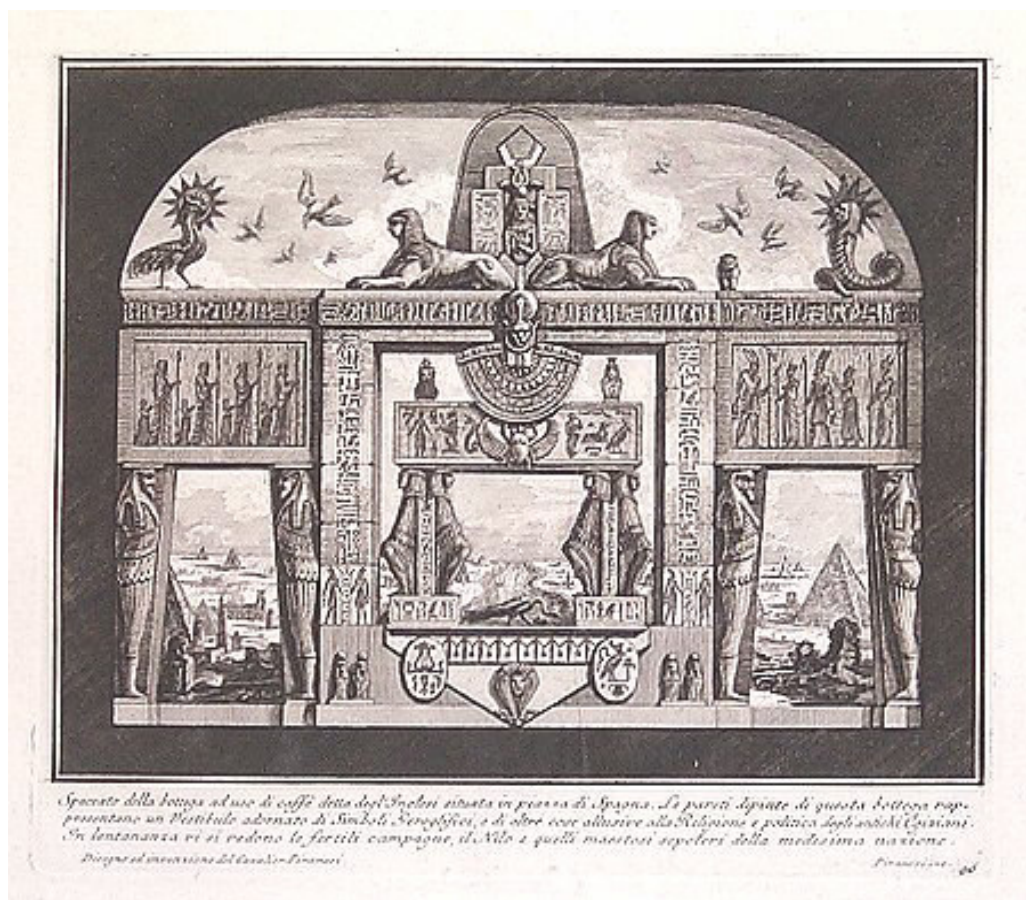


Figure 3.53. Painted scheme in the Egyptian taste for the Caffé degli Inglesi, Rome (shorter wall), *Diverse maniere*, 1769 (executed in 1760)

⁹² About the eighteenth-century price of the *Diverse maniere* see Hofer, “Piranesi as Book Illustrator,” *Piranesi*, pp. 86-87.

⁹³ Brinsley Ford, ed., “The Memoirs of Thomas Jones,” *Walpole Society* 32 (1946-48): 54.

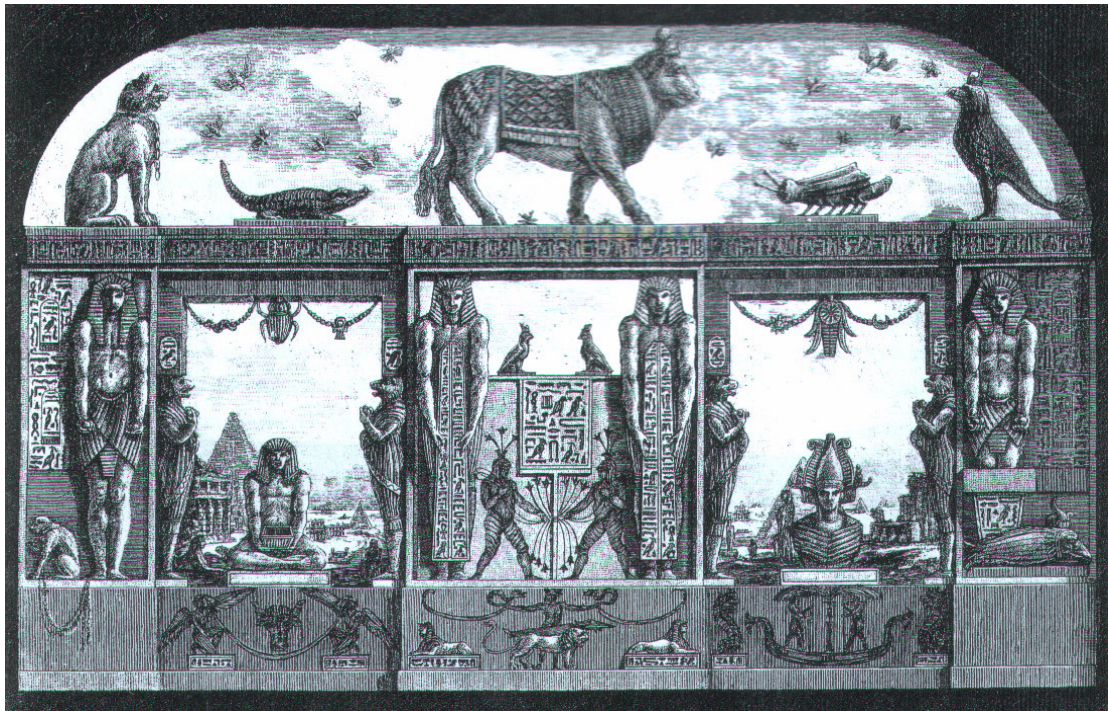


Figure 3.54. Painted scheme in the Egyptian taste for the Caffé degli Inglesi, Rome (longer wall),
Diverse maniere, 1769 (executed in 1760)

With help from the antiquarian and dealer Gavin Hamilton, sculptors Nolleken, Bartolomeo Cavaceppi and Pietro Malatesta, Piranesi was following the recent excavations (at the end of the 1770s) conducted in the Pantanelo area of Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli. Benefiting from the findings of antiquity obtained in these excavations, Piranesi designed individual compositions and gathered the plates in his publication of *Vasi* in 1778. Some of the most elaborate designs from the *Vasi* are the funerary monument of Augustus Urbanus with boar's head rhyton⁹⁴ (Fig. 3.55), the Newdigate Candelabrum (Fig. 3.56), and the Warwick Vase (Fig. 3.57).

⁹⁴ "Funerary monument of Augustus Urbanus with boar's head rhyton" was sold by Francesco Piranesi to Gustav III of Sweden in 1785 with some other pieces from his father's archive: A. Geffroy, "Essai sur la formation des collections d'antiques de la Suède," *Revue Archéologique* XXX (1896); Ernst Kjellberg, "Piranesis antiksamling i Nationalmuseum," *Nationalmusei Årsbock*, Stockholm 2 (1920): 156-69.

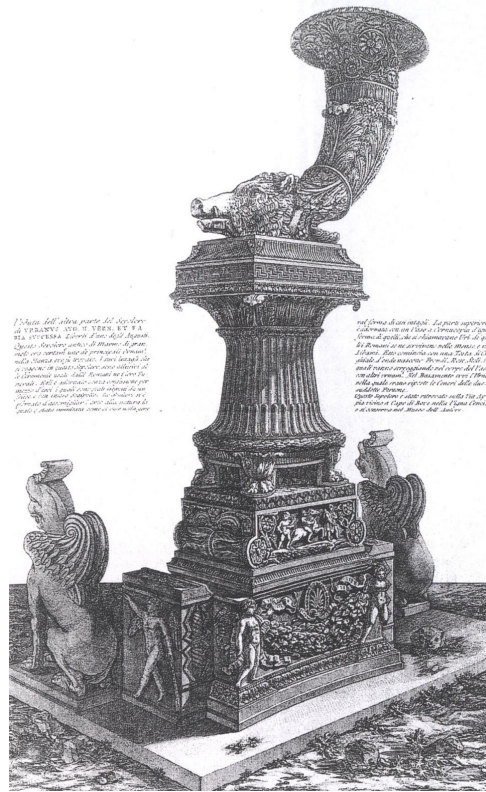


Figure 3.55. Funerary monument of Augustus Urbanus with boar's head rhyton, Vasi, 1778



Figure 3.56. Drawing for Newdigate candelabrum, Vasi, 1778



Figure 3.57. The Warwick Vase, Vasi, 1778

Piranesi suffered from a bladder complaint and died in Rome on 9 November 1778. After his death the family moved their business to Paris.⁹⁵ Piranesi's children Laura and Pietro had been trained to continue their father's business.⁹⁶ Francesco also continued to etch and tried to maintain his father's style.⁹⁷ Although Laura was known little, she published a series of reduced versions of her father's plates. Later Pietro published some plates by his father in Rome during the 1800s. He also published a series with his brother Francesco.⁹⁸ As may be gathered from his works, the most active of Piranesi's children was Francesco. He studied architecture in Paris, in the branch of landscape drawings and etching techniques. None of Piranesi's children could achieve to obtain more success and popularity than their father had.

⁹⁵ For information about his family's move to Paris see Murray, *Piranesi and the Grandeur of Ancient Rome*, p. 7; Wilton-Ely, *Mind and Art*, p. 119, 125n.3.

⁹⁶ Duchesne, *Quelques Idées sur l'Etablissement des Frères Piranesi*.

⁹⁷ Francesco Piranesi, *A Plan of Pompei, Engraved by F. Piranesi in 1785, accompanied by three views of Pompeii after Louis Jean Desprez and a View of Villa Medici, Engraved by F. Piranesi, and Two Engravings after Mural Paintings in Pompeii*, by G. Carattoni (Paris: n.p., 1836); Francesco Piranesi, *Pianta delle Fabriche Esistenti nella Villa Adriana*. F. Piranesi (Rome, 1781); Francesco Piranesi, *Raccolta de' Tempj Antichi. Prima Parte Che Comprende i Tempj di Vesta Madre, Ossia della Terra, e della Sibilla e dell'Onore e della Virtù* (Rome, 1780).

⁹⁸ Francesco Piranesi and Pietro Piranesi, *Antiquités d'Herculanum, Gravées par Th. Piroli, et Publiées par F. et P. Piranesi* (Paris, 1804-06).

CHAPTER 4

WHY IS PIRANESI MISINTERPRETED: FLETCHER'S *TREE OF ARCHITECTURE*

4.1. 'Excessive' and 'Eclectic' or Architectural History of Archaeology?

Regardless of whether it serves to dismiss the architect as an aberration or to commend him as immensely creative, one of the qualities on which the evaluation of Piranesi's work is based is his "excessiveness" which is found at once to yield "hermeticism" and "barbarism." While Tafuri finds that Piranesi's stylistic excesses "end up with a kind of *typological negation*, an 'architectural banquet of nausea', a semantic void created by an excess of visual,"¹ Adolf K. Placzek displays a more controlled appraisal. The title of his article signifies his embracing attitude: "The (Classical, Baroque, Rocco, Romantic, Modern) Vision of Piranesi."² Placzek accepts that Piranesian design represents a break with tradition which he expresses through a quotation from Vincent Scully: according to Scully, Piranesi's design represents "the end of the old, humanist, man-centered world with its fixed values—and the beginning of the mass age of modern history, with its huge environments and rushing continuities."³ True, but even though both Scully and Placzek share the impression with many others, the implicit explanation of Piranesian design as 'eclectic', the substitution of 'eclecticism' for 'excessiveness', does equally little to elucidate what Piranesi was after.⁴ Piranesi's design system depended on going back in history up to the first canons and utilizing their archetypes and representing all interim historic stages of design

¹ Tafuri, *Sphere and Labyrinth*, p. 35.

² Placzek, "The (Classical, Baroque, Rocco, Romantic, Modern) Vision of Piranesi," pp. 27-33.

³ Vincent Scully, quoted by Placzek, "The (Classical, Baroque, Rocco, Romantic, Modern) Vision of Piranesi," p. 27.

⁴ Bloomer, Murray and Karl Lehmann are among those who evaluate Piranesi's design approach as 'eclectic': Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, pp. 67-80; Murray, *Piranesi and the Grandeur of Ancient Rome*, pp. 53-59; Karl Lehmann, "Piranesi as Interpreter of Roman Architecture," in Smith College Museum of Art's exhibition catalogue, *Piranesi*, pp. 88-93.

regardless of whether the project concerned church, chimney, or prison (Fig. 3.51, 4.1 and 4.2).

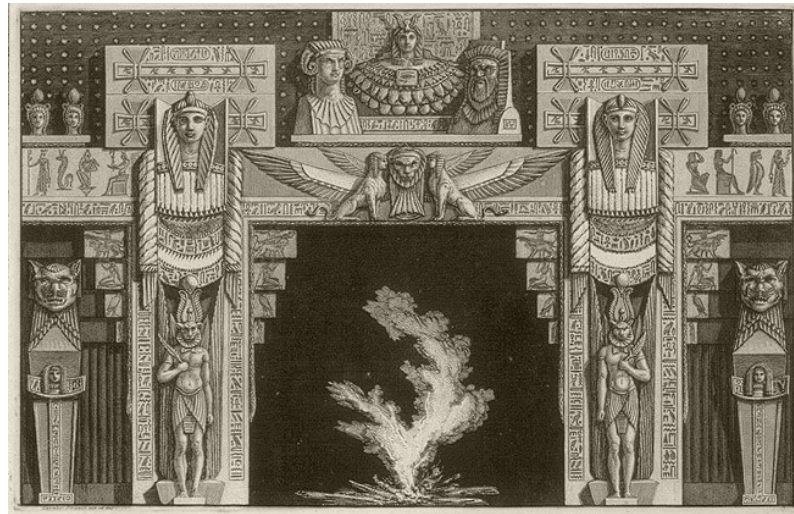


Figure 4.1. Chimneypiece in Egyptian manner, Plate XXIV, *Diverse maniere*, 1769



Figure 4.2. Plate XIV, *Invenzioni capricci di carceri*, 1745

“I find it a difficult and melancholy business,” wrote Goethe in 1786 in Rome, “separating the old Rome from the new.”⁵ As Leonard Barkan pointed out, “With the exception of a very brief period, the history of Rome is a history of the idea of a city

⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italian Journey*, trans. W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer (1962; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 133.

that used to be.”⁶ For Piranesi the problem resided in more than a dualism of old and new. It was much more stratified.

He sought for a way of transposing or transliterating Goethe’s recognition/problem into architectural drawing in both vectors of drawing: in the more ‘technical’ one comprising ground plan, section, etc. and in the *veduta* kind. For the former, he devised the means whereby he inserted letters of the alphabet at the relevant parts of a building’s structural or other component. The letters referred to extended captions that could be included in the plate or extend outside (Fig. 4.3).⁷ His drawings of the latter earned him the epithets of ‘eclecticism’ and ‘excessiveness’. While virtually all Piranesi drawings may be classified in this manner, the *Cestius Pyramid* (Fig. 5.12)

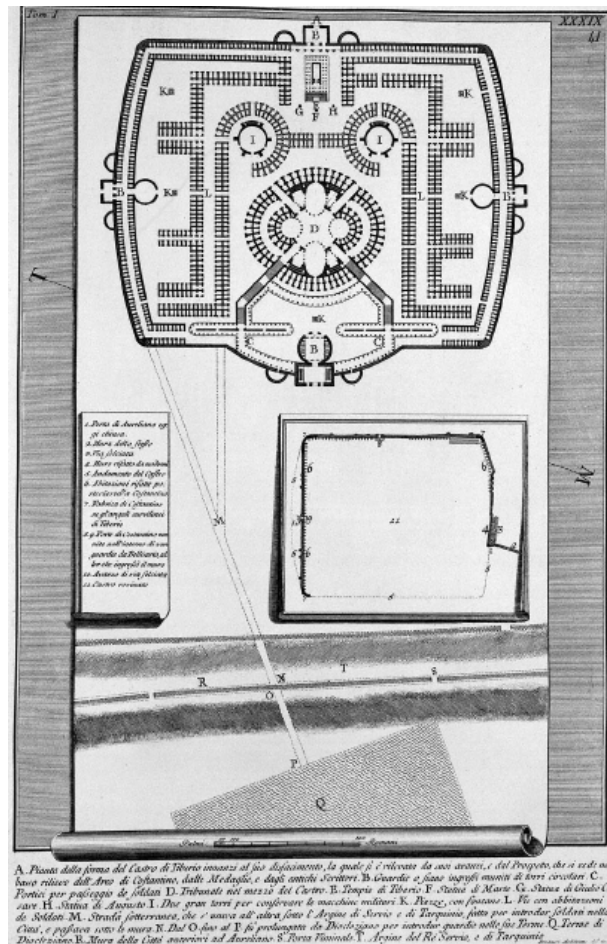


Figure 4.3. *Pianta della forma del Castrum di Tiberio, ecc., Antichità, I, 1756*

⁶ Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 20.

⁷ Figures 3.21, 3.29, 3.30, 3.42 examples of this practice.

is a particularly explicit example to which we shall return in Chapter 5.⁸ In brief, while a drawing of the kind depicted in Fig. 4.3 represents the historicity of architecture vertically, a *veduta* depicts it experientially *and* ontologically.

Indeed, one may object that it was not a drawing like that of the *Cestius Pyramid* (Fig. 5.12) that earned Piranesi the cited epithets, for these he was not designing, only rendering what was present in his environment. But his designs, which *did* earn him the epithets, follow the same principle. Rykwert's evaluation of Piranesian complexity in the passage below is meant to be negative, but implicitly points at the presence, in Piranesi, of a vision of architectural history as, on the one hand, archaeological fragment and, on the other, as of a presence that requires acknowledgement of all historical layering:

Piranesi's use of the frieze in the *Osservazioni* compositions, his obsessional concern with bas-relief, again echoes the authenticity of the antique fragment torn from the vast corpse of the past and embedded in an imitatively articulated scaled-down present. By playing on it continuously, he exaggerates the contrast which Winckelmann, too, must have felt sharply in the Villa Albani and to which I have already alluded in describing the setting of the frieze over the door of the central *salone* of the villa.⁹

As we are going to see later, Piranesi had a view of European architectural history and especially its roots that radically differed from the approach that was going to gain momentum as the eighteenth century wore on. The view of Western architectural history that was gaining ground was Hellenism, with Winckelmann one of its major spokesmen. Regardless of whether this correctly reflected the styles of Greek Antiquity, the Greek Revival was associated with restraint and purity.¹⁰ Illustrated at Fig. 4.7 below is the *Parte di ampio magnifico porto* (Part of a spacious and magnificent harbor, 1750) to which we shall return as a conclusive illustration representing Piranesi's vision of architectural history. The *Porto* bears all elements which, Piranesi found, went into the making of that history. "Most bizarre of all," finds Penny of this drawing, "is the

⁸ See p. 107.

⁹ Rykwert, *First Moderns*, p. 370.

¹⁰ Wilton-Ely attributes the cancellation of Piranesi's *San Giovanni in Laterano* project to the rising taste for 'Greek restraint', which, he claims "found the language of Piranesi's design extravagant and highly idiosyncratic." See Wilton-Ely's Introduction to his edition of Piranesi's *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, p. 16. For an opposite view that ascribes such cancellations in Piranesi's career to the cost factor, see Joseph Connors, "Il libro dei conti della Avery Architectural library della Columbia University," *Piranesi e l'Aventino*, ed. Barbara Jatta, exhibition catalogue, Santa Maria del Priorato, Rome, 16 September-8 December 1998 (Milan: Electa, 1998), pp. 86-94.

foreground pier with its massive trophy jammed into the corbelled ledge, which supports the truncated pyramid, and the fluted shaft capped by the urn and flag. Such concoctions look forward to Piranesi's later experiments with brutal combinations of disparate ornamental elements."¹¹ What Penny finds "brutal" was (is) an inseparable, fundamental element of not only Rome, but of all Italy, perhaps of all Mediterranean. For Piranesi, "the truncated pyramid" was part of the Roman past—concretely. After Egypt had become part of the Roman Empire in 31 BC, its rich culture elicited interest, affecting not only architecture, but also motivating "a steady stream" into Rome, in Wittkower's words, of "portable objects."¹² The "portable objects" included obelisks, for instance. Thirteenth-century Rome underwent yet another period of lively interest in Egypt: "Sphinxes turned up in stylistically remarkably correct adaptations," writes Wittkower, "and, for the first time, pyramids were incorporated in Christian tomb monuments."¹³ There was yet another period of revival of interest in Egypt starting with the Renaissance. But this one proved a permanent influence; for, it came not only as decorative trend but along with philological and philosophical study and investigation of the hieroglyph. One quite known example of this is the Contarini tomb designed by Sanmichele in 1544-1548 in the church Il Santo in Padua. Egyptian material became the moving force behind Renaissance Florentine Neo-Platonism. Wittkower maintains that, starting with the Renaissance, Egyptian presence in European, especially Italian art proved permanent.¹⁴

Wittkower's account of Egyptian presence in European architecture from 31 BC, when Egypt became part of the Roman Empire, through the eighteenth century remains the most comprehensive account. As he himself points out, the topic is very understudied.¹⁵ This lack may be attributed to those very reasons by which Piranesi is relegated to a domain of 'unclassifiable eclecticism', whose final explanation will be taken up in the second part of the present chapter. Thus, continuing to follow Wittkower, we may cite one eighteenth-century work that makes up the predecessor of

¹¹ Penny, *Piranesi*, p. 10.

¹² Wittkower, "Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania," p. 260.

¹³ Wittkower, "Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania," p. 260.

¹⁴ Wittkower, "Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania," pp. 260-63.

¹⁵ Wittkower, "Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania," p. 260.

Piranesi's work that has made it appear eclectic at best and comprise "brutal combinations of disparate ornamental elements" at nearly worst.

Fischer von Erlach's 1721 *Entwurf einer historischen Architektur*,¹⁶ which has been mentioned before and which, Wittkower maintains, Piranesi studied around 1743,¹⁷ was "the first to approach the stylistic phenomenon of Egyptian art and architecture as unbroken continuity from Archaic Egypt to modern times."¹⁸ Fischer von Erlach had never been to Egypt. He used travelers' books. His drawings, unlike Piranesi's, were generic and stylized—"foggy," in Wittkower's words (Fig. 4.4).¹⁹ Piranesi made two sketches after Fischer von Erlach's plates, both of which are in the Pierpont Morgan Library today (Fig. 4.5).²⁰ But, says Wittkower, Piranesi's serious considerations concerning Egyptian architecture start in 1756, with the *Antichità*.²¹ And, persuading the Egyptian motif, Piranesi arrives at his most radical point: in the *Parere* of 1765, claims Wittkower, "All the rules are cast to the wind."²²

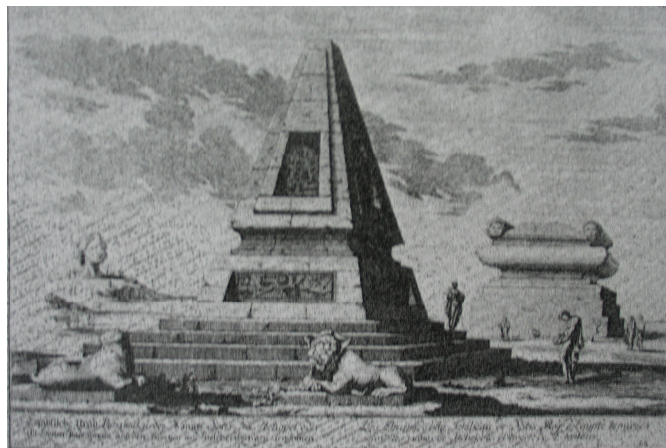


Figure 4.4. Fischer von Erlach, plate showing tombs at Heliopolis, *Entwurf einer historischen Architektur*, 1721

¹⁶ Fischer von Erlach, *Entwurf einer historischen Architektur* (Vienna, 1721).

¹⁷ Wittkower, "Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania," p. 265.

¹⁸ Wittkower, "Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania," p. 265.

¹⁹ Wittkower, "Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania," p. 265.

²⁰ The archive number is 1966.11:17.

²¹ A year later, in 1757, F. L. Norden was going to publish the architectural *Travels in Egypt and Nubia*. Cited by Wittkower, "Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania," p. 264.

²² Wittkower, "Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania," p. 266.

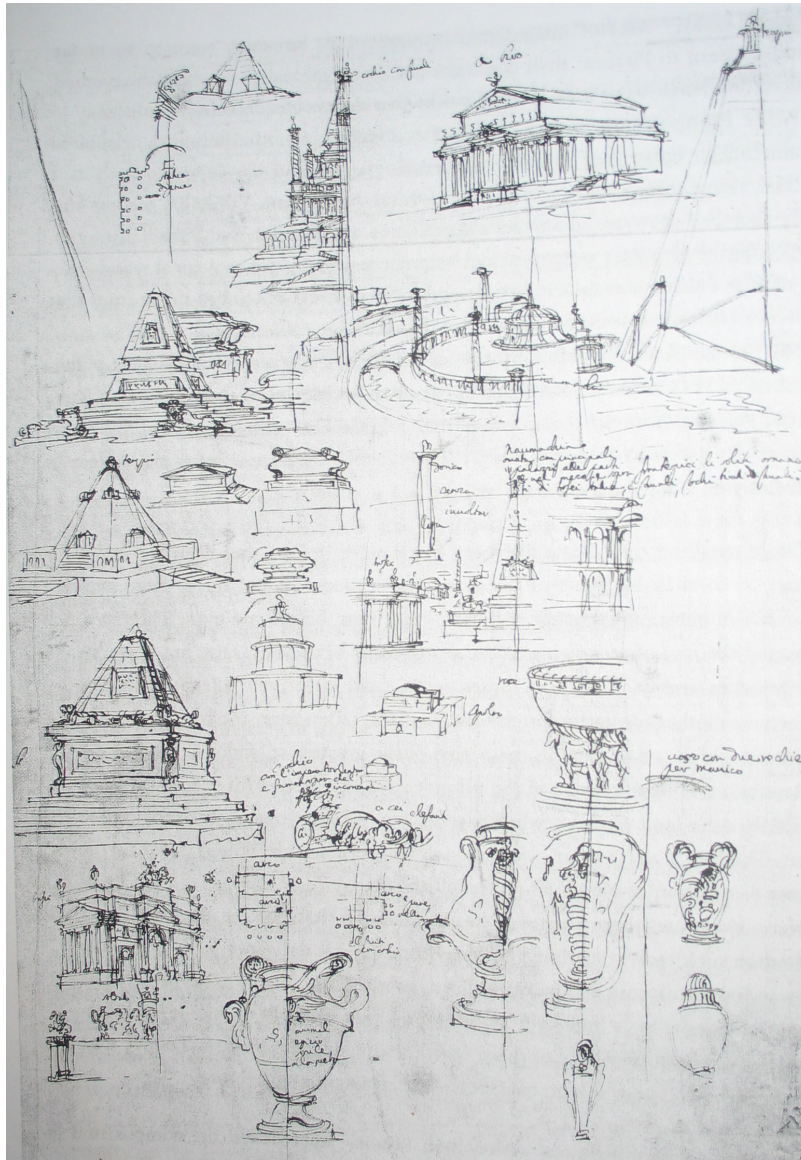


Figure 4.5. Sheet of sketches after Fischer von Erlach's *Entwurf einer historischen Architektur*

Piranesi would indeed appear as ‘casting all the rules to the wind’ if we view the *Parere* from a post-Winckelmannian perspective of architectural history or from the perspective of mid-century Parisian Neo-Classicism or from the perspective of a Britain which, around 1750, privileged a classicism that was oriented toward the revival of Renaissance Italian architects’ interpretation of Antiquity. For Piranesi himself, these perspectives were part of an architectural history that would serve as material for future archaeologists. Or, they interested him with reference to empirical and design-and-construction approach characteristics they were able to uncover about the past. As dictating the rule for design projects in the present, however, he cast them aside as “mimetic”—a Piranesian critique we shall look at in Chapter 5.

Oechslin claimed in 1976 that Piranesi changed architectural experience and assigned it to a simple, fundamental factor: his interest in archaeology.²³ Piranesi was not simply an architect with an interest in architectural history, but one with an engagement with the historiography of archaeology itself.²⁴ Oechslin's designation perhaps comes closest to grasping Piranesi's stance and particular interests that have led the most prominent architectural historians of our day to incomprehension. The error resides in attempting to read Piranesian drawing as purely architectural design. One must admit that when approached thusly, Piranesi does not only appear 'eclectic' or 'excessive', but, on occasion, even kitschy. Today, we assign Winckelmann the stature of the 'first modern archaeologist'.²⁵ But we do so because his view of the European history of art and architecture as deriving from radical Greek origins eventually came to dominate a (western) world that was going to draw a very precise geographic line of where West began and the geo-politico-spatial line thus drawn was equally going to determine the space within which the archaeologically determined beginnings of Western architecture could be investigated. This line excluded Egypt.

Thus the problem in interpreting Piranesi is two-fold: his view of the conjunction of architectural history and archaeology that demanded investigation fell outside the geo-political boundaries that were consolidated by the nineteenth century. His drawings were more architectural historiography than design. This, however, is not to say that he did not have a proposal or even program for how to design in his day. But he called for a design that laid bare its—the West's—historical roots in as much studied detail as possible. Contrary to the mostly Anglo-American critics we have cited above, there are architectural continental historians in addition to Oechslin, who have long held Piranesi to be perhaps the best interpreter of ancient Rome.²⁶ We may, of course, add Wittkower to this list of continental historians as he ultimately acknowledges that

²³ Oechslin, "L'intérêt archéologique," pp. 395-418.

²⁴ Oechslin, "L'intérêt archéologique," p. 395.

²⁵ Winckelmann, *Sendschreiben von den herculanischen Entdeckungen* (Dresden: Walter, 1762; 1764).

²⁶ An example is Lehmann, "Piranesi as Interpreter of Roman Architecture," in the exhibition catalogue *Piranesi*, pp. 88ff. See also particularly the Introduction to Giulio Cressedi, ed., *Un Manoscritto Derivato dalle 'Antichità' del Piranesi: Vaticano Latino 8091* (Rome: Fratelli Palombi Editori, 1975), where it is argued, as in this thesis, that Piranesi as archaeologist has been seriously neglected. We may add, as work done to compensate this neglect, Wilton-Ely's "Piranesian Symbols on the Aventine," *Apollo* 103 (March 1976): 214-27.

Piranesi worked with the eighteenth-century anthologist's all-inclusive perspective, much in the manner of the French Encyclopedists.²⁷

The polemical debates in which Piranesi was caught up throughout his lifetime were being generated at the very historical moment that not only codified architectural Neo-Classicism, but also generated architectural history as a history of styles. The debate mounted as one discovered and further excavated Herculaneum, Paestum, Spalato, and Greece. When Piranesi was born, there was yet no archaeology proper. There were antiquarians and connoisseurs, who were interested in old artefacts, writings, objects, and eventually, sites. They were collectors and amateurs who wrote on their findings. But they contributed to the formation of museums.²⁸ With Oechslin, one is compelled to claim that Piranesi was the first modern archaeologist. So, we must ask whether, aside from the modern-day separation of the disciplines of architecture and archaeology, is Piranesi misinterpreted?

4.2. “The Tree of Architecture”

Sir Banister Fletcher's work entitled *A History of Architecture* was first published in 1896. It has gone through numerous editions and is still studied widely in the Anglo-American world as a standard text book on the history of architecture.²⁹ When the enlarged twentieth version was published as its centennial edition in 1996, *The American Institute of Architects* declared it the Book of the Century.³⁰ Its translations have similarly attained wide circulation outside the Anglo-American world.³¹ One reason for the wide recognition the work has attained is emphasized in its subtitle. This subtitle expresses the comprehensiveness of the book: “The comparative

²⁷ Wittkower, “Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania,” p. 266.

²⁸ Hofer, “Piranesi as Book Illustrator,” p. 87.

²⁹ For discussion of Fletcher's work, see Esra Akcan, “Küresel Çağda Eleştirelilik: ‘Öteki’ Coğrafyalar Sorunsalı,” *Arredamento Mimarlık* (March 2002): 81n.29; Gülsüm Baydar Nalbantoğlu, “The Cultural Burden of Architecture,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 57: 4 (2004): 22-23.

³⁰ On the election of Fletcher's work as the Book of the Century see Peter Davey, “Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture*, Twentieth and Centennial Edition,” *The Architectural Review* (December 1996): 96-97.

³¹ For information about translations of *A History of Architecture*, see Gülsüm Nalbantoğlu, “Toward Postcolonial Openings: Rereading Sir Banister Fletcher's History of architecture,” *Assemblage* 35 (April 1998): 13-15.

method.” Fletcher’s book was “comparative” as it not only discussed the history of western architecture by following the itinerary Winckelmann had drawn for it, but also took up other, non-western traditions. This widely influential work had the power to represent the perception of architectural history of an entire western culture, including its view of other cultures’ architecture. Its manner, or rather its system of incorporating the other traditions, indicates yet another reason behind the perception of Piranesi as an ‘un-scientific’ ‘idiosyncratic’ figure, ‘frenetic’ on account of his *Egyptomanie*, and even as a ‘madman’. It was obviously not possible for Fletcher not to mention Piranesi when writing a History of Architecture. The tendency of the western historiographic approach to catalogue *everything*, which is a tendency that began in the eighteenth century, would render it impossible not to mention at all this architect who produced a tremendous amount. (The irony is, of course, that Piranesi was one of the inventors of this method of comprehensive cataloguing.) Piranesi’s productivity made this exclusion impossible. Nonetheless, when Piranesi was included in Fletcher’s history, he was presented as posing an oddity in the rational progress of Western Architectural History.

Fletcher’s statements about the ‘non western’ architectures were west-centric, and colonialist. He positioned his organizing center in order to exclude other traditions even as he included them.³² Fletcher himself prepared and enlarged the new editions of his book until his death. R. A. Cordingley, the editor of the first posthumous edition of the work, revised the book and attempted to erase traces of west-centrism: to the fourth edition of 1901 Fletcher had introduced the titles of “Historical” and “Non-Historical” architectures. Under the heading of “Historical” architectures, Fletcher had discussed Western architecture. The non-Western, he had taken up under the heading of “Non-Historical.” Cordingley changed these titles and erased the illustration of the tree that gave a snap-shot view of the history of architecture.³³ Fletcher’s expressions emphasizing the division between Eastern and Western architectures are absent from the centennial 1996 edition. In time, editors identified the “Historical” with the West and this part of the book was re-titled “Ancient Architecture and the Western Succession.” The part on the “Non-Historical” styles was re-titled “Architecture in the East.” Each

³² For information on the traditions excluded from the History of Architecture see Davey, “Sir Banister Fletcher’s A History of Architecture,” pp. 96-97; Nalbantoğlu, “Toward Postcolonial Openings,” pp. 13, 15; and Akcan, “Küresel Çağda Eleştirelilik,” p. 74.

³³ For Fletcher’s addition, see the 1901 edition of *A History of Architecture: On the Comparative Method*. On Fletcher’s addition, also see Akcan, “Küresel Çağda Eleştirelilik,” p. 81n.29.

editor updated the book, added some parts and tried to erase the colonialistic terms and implications. But regardless of whether it was named ‘Eastern’ or “Non-Historical,” the characteristic of this architecture was a lack of change and development, stagnancy, ancientness and the character of being limited to a certain restricted geography. While the “Historical” western group was shown to be progressing and generating names of historical periods and styles—such as Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, etc.—the architectures belonging to the “Non-Historical,” non-western group were entitled by geographical names—Egypt, Near East, Russia, China, Africa, and so on. This feature may still be seen in the edition of 1996. The editors’ efforts were not enough to erase Fletcher’s primary hypotheses in the composition of the book. Starting with the first edition, and included in it until 1961 (including the 1961 edition), was the figure of “The Tree of Architecture” (Fig. 4.6) that demonstrated the position of world architectures in relation to their relative situation in the History of Architecture. Though removed from the book, the tree continues to shape not only Fletcher’s book but also a conception of architectural history that has been preserved in Wilton-Ely and Tafuri and Nicholas Penny, as evinced in their evaluations of Piranesi.

It is necessary to examine Fletcher’s tree illustration closely. Its immediately outstanding characteristic is that it *naturalizes* the proposed conception of history by representing it by a figure taken from nature: the tree represents architecture. The Muses of disciplines adjacent to architecture are lined up around the base and trunk of the tree—Geography, Geology, Climate, Religion, Social and History. Climate and Religion are directly supporting the trunk. Making up the foundation and soil upon which The Tree of Architecture rises, the Muses also generate a mythic domain. Immediately above the Muses, in the part deriving from their classical iconography and adjacent to the mythical domain, Peruvian, Mexican and Egyptian architectures are placed to the left of the trunk from the reader’s perspective. Assyrian, Indian and Chinese & Japanese architectures assume their place to the right of the trunk. When their distance to Greek architecture, which forms the first element inscribed on the trunk further up, is considered, it is seen that these six alien architectures are closer to the domain of myth represented by the Muses’ sprawl than to Greek architecture. Piranesi’s Egypt is located in this group. Egypt is closer to the trunk than Mexican, Peruvian, Indian and Chinese & Japanese architectures. Nevertheless, since Egypt is placed in

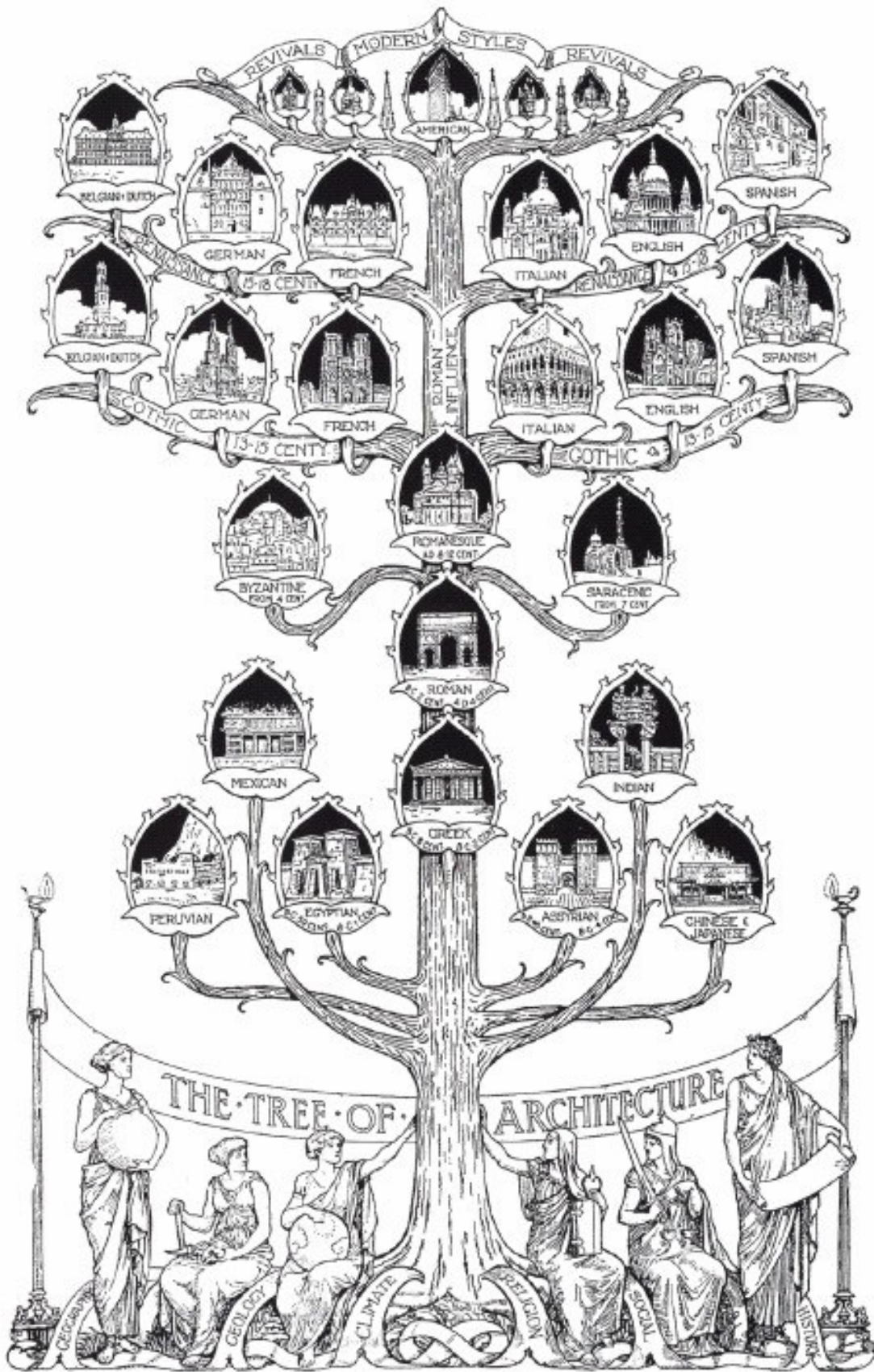


Figure 4.6. Fletcher, "The Tree of Architecture"

symmetry with the Assyrian, we realize that the reason of this short distance between Egypt and the trunk is geographical proximity rather than historical interaction. Egypt does not belong to Fletcher's "Historical" group. The Historical Western Architecture progressing without any interruption begins with the Greek and continues with the Roman; and the trunk, the History of Architecture itself, is crowned by American architecture. On the other hand, Egypt has been placed with the "Non-Historical" group because it did not evolve and contribute to the Western History of Architecture.

We can classify Fletcher's evaluation of Piranesi under three headings: "fascination" with Egypt; the fact that Piranesi gives priority to Rome instead of Greece; and his passion of the Roman on the order of a "megalomaniac": "The megalomaniac vision of the Roman architecture," wrote Fletcher, "expressed in Piranesi's engravings of ancient buildings and his 'carceri' series, was an enormously influential counterweight to Rococo frivolity."³⁴ "Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-78), best known for his dramatic architectural etchings and for championing the Roman architecture at the expense of Greek, produced at Santa Maria del Priorato, Rome, his most important essay in built architecture [...] The obelisks punctuating the piazza reflect Piranesi's fascination with ancient Egypt."³⁵ Apart from considering that Fletcher's evaluation of Piranesi includes him (i.e., Fletcher) among those who found Piranesi 'idiosyncratic', we can also think that Fletcher is the writer who determined the reception of Piranesi in modern times. Fletcher and most architectural historians have found Piranesi *unclassifiable*. Piranesi is indeed *unclassifiable* in terms of Fletcher's classification of architectures.

Piranesi's view of the *Orient* was, however, clearer than the nebulous descriptions of his work would warrant. In order to comprehend it, we may examine his representation of the Venice harbor, which is accepted as one of Piranesi's most creative and richest designs:³⁶ in *Parte di ampio magnifico porto* published in the series of *Opere varie* (Fig. 4.7), Piranesi managed to create a design system that is defined distinctly as 'Piranesian'. It is a style that juxtaposes elements derived from Antiquity with Archaic figures and archetypes derived from Egyptian and Etruscan repertoires. In the *Porto*, the richness, diversity and creative power of the imagination in the forms

³⁴ Fletcher, *A History of Architecture*, p. 846.

³⁵ Fletcher, *A History of Architecture*, p. 919.

³⁶ For a discussion of Piranesi's drawing of the harbor, see Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, p. 19.

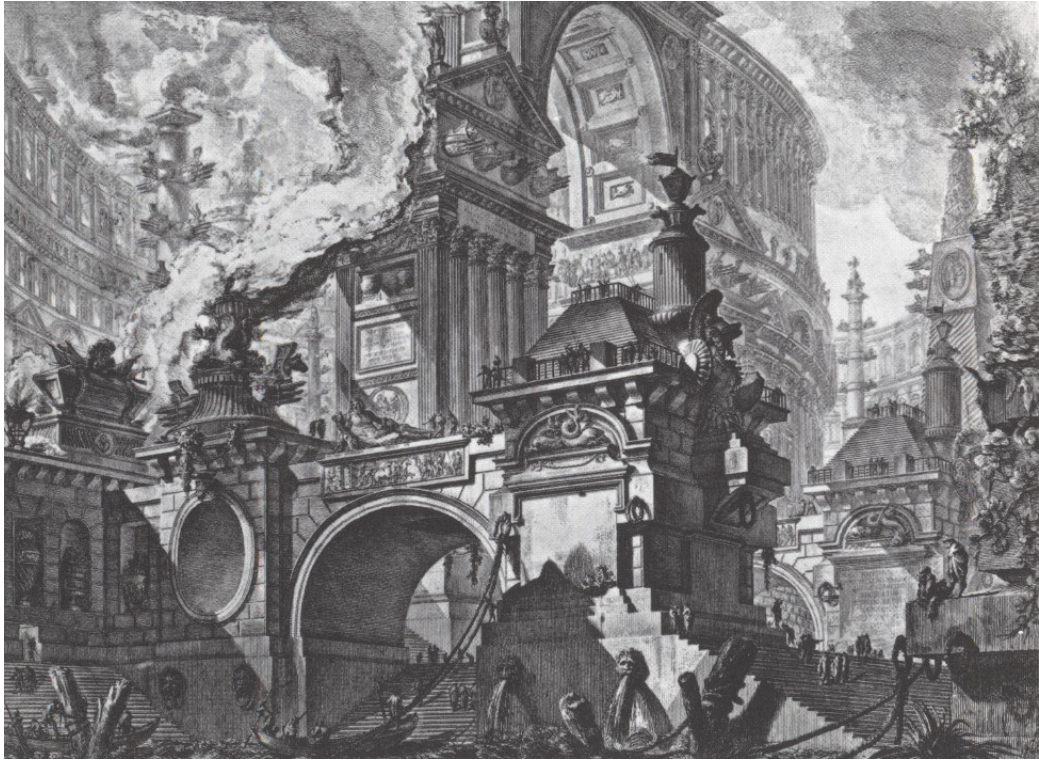


Figure 4.7. *Parte di ampio magnifico porto, Opere varie, 1750*

composing an effective architectural fantasy were all invented by Piranesi. This new system of composition was defined later by Piranesi himself in the following words in “An Apologetical Essay in Defense of the Egyptian and Tuscan Architecture” prefacing the *Diverse maniere*: “Art, seeking after new inventions, borrowed [...] from nature ornaments, changing and adapting them as necessity required” (*Diverse maniere*, 12). As in the Renaissance, in the eighteenth century still, ‘nature’ was a wide category that included architectural layers of the past as well as new inventions that somehow leaned on the past but also explored and innovated. Piranesi thus explained not only the sources of his architectural inventions, but also his notion of how the history of architecture proceeded. As may be observed in the example of the *Porto*, Piranesi could embrace all traditions by means of this allegorical port opening from Venice to Asia and Africa.

CHAPTER 5

ASIA, EUROPE, AFRICA AND HISTORY OF STYLES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

5.1. The Eighteenth-Century Debate on Origins and Its Background

During the eighteenth century, architectural circles of Western Europe were engaged in a debate concerning the origins of Roman architecture. The most eminent architects and theorists such as Piranesi, Winckelmann, and Julien-David Le Roy (1724-1803) were involved in this debate. Among the leading controverters, Piranesi believed that although it owed some of its features to Grecian architecture, Roman civilization, art and architecture were not derived entirely from the Grecian civilization but rather based on the Etruscan which, in turn, was rooted in Archaic Egypt.¹ Against this view, leaning upon a two thousand year old tradition, some argued that Roman architecture was rooted in the Grecian. One of the most important defenders of this counter-argument was Winckelmann, who accelerated both the Greek revival and the rise of Neoclassicism. By taking as example the temples of Paestum in Naples, Italy, Winckelmann linked the roots of both the Roman and whole European architecture to that of the Grecian. According to Winckelmann, Paestum was in Grecian manner since it stimulated the effect of ‘nobility’ with respect to aesthetical concepts.² In his work entitled *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Mahlerey und Bildbauer-Kunst* and dated to 1755, Winckelmann defined Grecian architecture as having “edle Einfalt und stille Grösse”: ‘noble simplicity and quiet grandeur’, and claimed that Romans, in copying Grecian architecture, had diminished the quality of ‘beauty’ inherent in the latter.³ He further developed this view in *Gedanken*’s 1765

¹ For Piranesi’s view on the origins of Roman architecture see his *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, pp. 87-88.

² For Winckelmann’s opinions on Paestum’s aesthetical quality see his *The History of Ancient Art*, trans. G. H. Lodge (Boston: Osgood, 1764; 1880), p. 138.

³ See Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Mahlerey und Bildbauer-Kunst*, *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, ed. Michele Cometa (Palermo: Aesthetica edizioni, 1755; 1992), p. 24. References to this work will be henceforward indicated in parentheses in the text.

edition: ‘The last and most eminent characteristic of the Greek works is a noble simplicity and a quiet grandeur in posture as in expression’ (21-22).⁴ In the 1765 edition of *Gedanken*, Winckelmann had elaborated further on Greek closeness to nature and thus on architecture’s originative power of beauty. ‘The Greeks alone’, he wrote, ‘seem to have thrown forth beauty as a potter makes his pot’ (264). Winckelmann stated that the aesthetical priority of Greece derived from its proximity to nature, and that this proximity was determined by its characteristic of being the ‘first’.

Another important name was the French Jesuit theorist Marc-Antoine Laugier (1711-1769). Laugier’s theories on the ‘origin’ and ‘importance of the imagination in architectural design’ stated in his *Essai sur l’Architecture* (Essay on Architecture, 1753) also served as a provocative work for Piranesi. His admiration towards Greece had Laugier set a defence in his work about the superiority of ancient Greek architectural design to that of the Roman. Laugier based his claim related to the superiority of Grecian architecture on the chronological precedence of this civilization and on the ‘rustic hut’ which had been described by Marcus Vitruvius (80/70 BC-25 BC) as the first human dwelling (Fig. 5.1). Laugier argued that Greeks had been able to develop this hut because they came prior to the Romans in history.⁵



Figure 5.1. Marc-Antoine Laugier, Rustic Hut, *Essai*, 1753

⁴ Winckelmann’s original words are as follows: “Das allgemeine vorzügliche Kennzeichen der griechischen Meisterstücke ist endlich eine edle Einfachheit, und eine stille Größe, sowohl in der Stellung als im Ausdrucke.”

⁵ For Vitruvius’s description of the ‘rustic hut’ see Vitruvius, *De architectura libri decem*, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morris Hicky Morgan (New York: Dover Publications, 1914; 1960), Book II: I C. References to this work will be henceforward indicated in parentheses in the text.

Laugier attributed the right to originate the 'rustic hut' to Greeks because of their chronological priority. The 'rustic hut' also referred the functional principles of nature and provided architecture with a base. Thus Laugier:

[...] man in his earliest origins, without any other, without other guide than the natural instinct of his needs. He wants a place to settle. Beside a tranquil stream he sees a meadow; the fresh turf pleases his eye, the tender down invites him. He approaches; and reclining on the bright colours of this carpet he thinks only of enjoying the gifts of nature in peace; he lacks nothing, he desires nothing; but presently the sun's heat begins to scorch him, and he is forced to look for shelter. A neighbouring wood offers the cool of its shadows, he runs to hide in its thicket; and he is content again. Meanwhile a thousand vapours which had risen in various places meet and join; thick clouds obscure the air, and fearful rains stream in torrents down on the delicious wood. The man, inadequately sheltered by leaves, does not know how to defend himself against the discomfort of a humidity which seems to attack him all sides. A cave comes into view: he slips into it; finding himself sheltered from the rain he is delighted with his discovery. But new defects make this dwelling disagreeable as well: he lives in the dark; the air he has to breathe is unhealthy. He leaves the cave determined to compensate by his industry for the omissions and neglect of nature. Man wants a dwelling which will house, not bury him. Some branches broken off in the forest are material to his purpose. He chooses four of the strongest, and raises them perpendicularly to the ground, to form a square. On these four he supports four others laid across them; above these he lays some which incline to both sides, and come to a point in the middle. This kind of roof is covered with leaves thick enough to keep out both sun and rain: and now man is lodged. True, the cold and the heat will make him feel their excesses in this house, which is open on all sides; but then he will fill the in-between spaces with columns and so find himself secure.

The little hut which I have just described is the type on which all the magnificences of architecture are elaborated. It is by approximating to its simplicity of execution that fundamental defects are avoided and true perfection attained. The upright pieces of wood suggest the idea of columns, the horizontal pieces resting on them, entablatures. Finally, the inclined members which constitute the roof provide the idea of a pediment. Note then what all masters of the art have confessed. Never has there been a principle more fruitful in its consequences; with it as guide it is easy to distinguish those parts which are essential components of an order of architecture from those parts which are only introduced through necessity or added by caprice. [...] Let us never lose sight of our little hut.⁶

Rykwert observes that Laugier places his hut on the same riverbank as Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's hut is indeed similar to Laugier's, but with respect to the moral principles rather than architectural ones.⁷

His philhellenism notwithstanding, Le Roy shared with Piranesi the view of Egypt's importance: different from the rest, in his *Ruines*, Le Roy asserted that Greeks inherited the concept of monumental architecture from the Egyptians and thus agreed with Piranesi to a certain extent since he also argued that the roots of monumental

⁶ Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture* (1753; Farnborough: Gregg, 1966), p. 2.

⁷ Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise*, pp. 43-44, 46-47. Wilton-Ely also claims that Laugier's view is the architectural version of Rousseau's: *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, p. 36.

architecture were in Egypt.⁸ At the point of architectural inheritance from Egypt, Piranesi and Le Roy shared the same stance. Nonetheless, Le Roy maintained that monumental European architecture was created by Greeks while Piranesi found that Etruscans in Egypt's wake invented it. Piranesi claimed that Romans inherited the architectural talent of Etruscans, and thus undertook sublime building in Rome. Le Roy, like Winckelmann, advocated the opposite by insisting that Romans had debased the beautiful architecture of Greeks by copying and lowering it to a shameful position because of lack of 'creative genius':

It seems that the Romans lacked the kind of creative genius that allowed the Greeks to make so many discoveries. They did not create anything of note in the orders. The one that is attributed to their invention, the Composite, is only a fairly imperfect mixture of the Ionic and Corinthian, and by altering the proportions of the column from the Doric order and by multiplying the mouldings of its entablature, they have perhaps made it lose a lot of its male character, which was its distinguishing feature in Greece.⁹

On the other hand, Piranesi's claim, which stated that Roman architecture was rooted in Etruscan and Egyptian architectures, was supported by the teachings of the Franciscan monk, Carlo Lodoli. Lodoli's views on architecture were found controversial in eighteenth-century Rome. Lodoli expressed his belief in the 'Egyptian origin' of Roman civilization in a stronger tone than even Piranesi: Lodoli had quite extraordinary but at the same time assertive claims in relation to historical authenticity such as his claim that the Doric order should be called the Egyptian order or that the Tuscan order had been invented by Egyptians.¹⁰ Another scholar and one of the disciples of Lodoli, the Italian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul, Andrea

⁸ For Le Roy's assertion see Le Roy, *Ruines*, p. 13. Also see Wilton-Ely's introduction to the volume of Piranesi, *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, pp. 17, 65.

⁹ Le Roy's original words are as follows: "Il paroît que les Romains manquèrent de ce génie créateur qui avoit ait faire tant de découvertes aux Grecs: ils n'imaginèrent rien de considérable dans les Ordres; celui dont ils s'attribuoient 'invention, que l'on nomme *Composite*, n'est qu'un mélange assez imparfait de l'Ionique et du Corinthien; et a force d'élever la proportion des colonnes de l'Ordre Dorique, et de multiplier les moulures de son entablement, ils lui ont peut-être fait perdre beaucoup de ce caractère male qui le distinguoit dans la Grèce." Le Roy, *Ruines*, p. 13. Also see Wilton-Ely's introduction to the volume of Piranesi, *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, p. 65 n.40.

¹⁰ Lodoli's opinion was cited from Memmo's work of Andrea Memmo, *Elementi d'architettura Lodoliana; ossia, L'arte del fabbricare con solidità scientifica e con eleganza non capricciosa* (Zara: Tipi dei Fratelli Battara, 1833; Milan: G. Mazzotta, 1973), pp. 296-97n.48. For further discussions see Wilton-Ely's introduction to the volume of Piranesi, *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, p. 21; and Rykwert, *First Moderns*, p. 322.

Memmo, claimed that the Phoenicians, Jews, Etruscans and Greeks had obtained their architectural styles from the Egyptians.¹¹

The concrete critical example to Piranesi's approach is manifest in his evaluation of one of the Roman fountains, *Aqua Felice* (Fig. 5.2). In the "Apologetical Essay" written as a preface to his book entitled *Diverse maniere*—which was written in Italian, French and English by himself in order to address a wider community—Piranesi praises the lions that are in the Egyptian manner whereas he denigrates those he accepts to be in the Grecian manner and depicts the *Aqua Felice* as follows:

I have in view, among other works of theirs [i.e. the Egyptians], the two Lions or Leopards which serve to adorn the fountain of the Felician aqueduct in Rome, together with two others studiously copied, both as to action and design from nature, that is, worked after the Grecian Manner. What majesty in the Egyptian ones, what gravity and wisdom, what union and modification of parts! How artfully are those parts set of which are agreeable to architecture, while those are suppressed which are not advantageous to it! Those other lions on the contrary, which are exactly copied from nature, and to which the artist capriciously gave what attitude he pleased, what have they to there? They only serve to diminish the great effect which the Egyptian ones gave to the architecture of that fountain; which, however, is not one of the most elegant (*Diverse maniere*, 14).

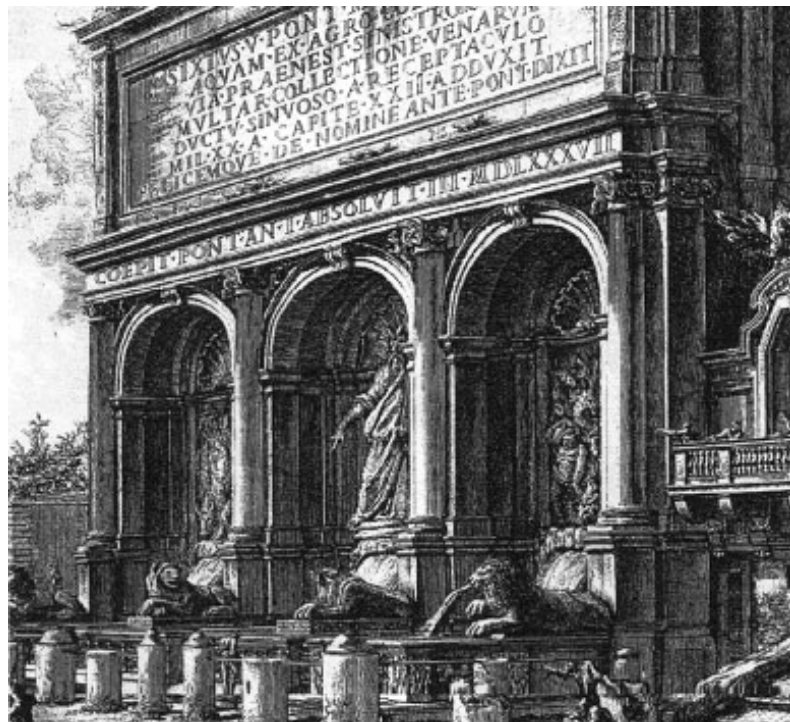


Figure 5.2. Detail from the view of the main fountain of the *Acqua Felice* demonstrating the 'Egyptian lions', *Vedute*, 1760

¹¹ For Memmo's claim see Memmo, *Elementi*, pp. 296-97. For a discussion about this subject see Rykwert, *First Moderns*, p. 323.

In the *Diverse maniere*, Piranesi was inclined towards a design approach composed of Egyptian archetypes and figures. In general, the series includes creative interior designs embellished with Egyptian figures. As mentioned above, the controversial “Apologetical Essay” accompanied these drawings. In the conclusion of the “Apologetical Essay,” Piranesi denotes his new system of design depending on the principles of Egyptian and Etruscan styles without excluding that of the Grecian. In the following passage, Piranesi implies the ‘Etruscan’ by the word ‘Tuscan’:

Must the Genius of our artists be so basely enslaved to the Grecian manners, as not to dare to take what is beautiful elsewhere, if it be not of Grecian origin? But let us at last shake off [f] this shameful yoke, and if the Egyptians, and Tuscans present to us, in their monuments, beauty, grace, and elegance, let us borrow from their stock, servilely copying from others, for this would reduce architecture and the noble arts [to] a pitiful mechanism, and would deserve blame instead of praise from the public who seek for novelty, and who would not form the most advantageous idea of an artist, as was perhaps the opinion some years ago, for a good design, if it was only a copy of some ancient work. No, an artist, who would do himself honour, and acquire a name, must not content himself with copying faithfully the ancients, but studying their works he ought to show himself of an inventive, and, I had almost said, of a creating Genius; And by prudently combining the Grecian, the Tuscan, and the Egyptian together, he ought to open himself a road to the finding out of new ornaments and new manners. The human understanding is not so short and limited, as to be unable to add new graces, and embellishments to the works of architecture, if to an attentive and profound study of nature one would likewise join that of the ancient monuments (*Diverse maniere*, 33).

As is clear from the expressions of the different parties regarding the debate of origins, discourses related to aesthetics and origin were intertwined with each other in the eighteenth century. In other words, debates related to the origin were based on aesthetical discussions and at least the philhellenic scholars were claiming that when copying it, the Romans had diminished the values of ‘beautiful’ Greece. The distinguishing feature of Piranesi emerges at this point: rooting the origin of Roman architecture in Egypt rather than Greece, he argued that the sublime character of Egyptian architecture was inherited by the Romans.¹² We know that the *sublime* was the fundamental concept of the aesthetical understanding during the period.¹³ In other words, Piranesi replied Winckelmann and his followers, who advocated the ‘beauty’ of Greece, with the concept of ‘sublime’ which was placed above ‘beauty’ in the hierarchy

¹² For a discussion of Piranesi’s argument regarding this point, see Rykwert, *First Moderns*, pp. 315-17.

¹³ For the aesthetical notions, debates and their effects on the eighteenth-century arts and architecture see Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*, pp. 166-74; Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, pp. 45-116; Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, pp. 49-73.

of aesthetics. Crystallizing since the 1750s, the aesthetical philosophy of the eighteenth century emerged along with such novel disciplines as archaeology, linguistics, and the history of art and architecture. Since he believed that monumental Roman architecture was derived from Egypt, by claiming that Romans and Greeks did not have any relations at least as far as architectural borrowings went, Piranesi rejected the theory arguing that Roman architecture failed in maintaining Grecian values. Therefore, by definition, like all monumental architecture, Egyptian architecture was sublime.

What lies, then, in the background of these eighteenth-century origin debates and what was there before the distinction, as points of origin, between Greek and Egyptian became an issue? The origin debates, which began in the eighteenth century and continued through the nineteenth, were related to determining the pre-national sources of the national culture. Therefore, the debates on national architecture progressed along with developments in the discipline of archaeology. In fact, the emergence of systematic archaeological activities can be explained by the directions research on national culture was taking. For example, the Scandinavian, Teutonic and British cultures, geographically, and hence historically, located at a distance from the archaic and antique civilizations of the Mediterranean, were compelled to search for traces of ancient cultures in their own geography whereas, placed at the orbit of Rome, Central and South European cultures enjoyed the ease with which they could readily avail themselves of roots in the Roman civilization.¹⁴ The south too faced a problem, however, when it came to establishing what was before Rome. It was at that point that such debates as described above emerged. Italians like Piranesi had at least two grounds for arguing that the Roman culture and architecture had its roots not in Greece but somewhere else: contrary to other regions of Europe, because of their geographic proximity to the Grecian culture, Italians were able to observe Greek examples directly or to obtain first-hand vivid descriptions from travellers. They could directly determine to what extent and whether their own architecture and the Grecian were dissimilar. The situation of Italians was entirely different than that of the British for example. The latter were able to realize only after seeing, in the nineteenth century, the sculpture Lord Elgin had stripped from the Parthenon and shipped to Britain, that their aesthetical conception of Antique Greece for almost a century had no relationship whatsoever to the truth of

¹⁴ For the search for ancient national-cultural roots in the north, and the comparison in this respect of the north with Italians, see Deniz Şengel, *Dickens ve Sidney: İngiltere'de Ulusal Edebiyatın Kuruluşu* (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2002), pp. 8-11, 17-22, 38-39, 51-52, 74-75.

Greek sculpture.¹⁵ The second proof Italians like Piranesi had available was the concrete presence of Etruscan ruins belonging to the pre-Roman period. These could not have descended from the Greek. Hence a Piranesi felt compelled to search for the origins of Etruscan art and architecture elsewhere. Equipped with a strong training both in languages and historical texts, and in architectural design and drawing, he was able to deploy himself for groundbreaking research into origins.¹⁶

Perhaps one of the most trenchant examples of how intertwined origin debates and archaeology were in the eighteenth century as well as of how Italians were able to produce views through their capacity of direct observation is the polemic that arose over Paestum. Significantly, the Paestum research also coalesced with an aesthetic-stylistic discussion. Despite the fact that the discovery of Paestum, which, as stated above, was the essential support for Winckelmann's argument, cannot be precisely dated, we know that after 1750 expeditions to this region grew more frequent despite the geographical problems posed by access and despite pirate attacks.¹⁷ As a result of the scientific expeditions, writers like Winckelmann could draw on the Paestum example in the debate on 'origin'. Father Antonio Paoli (1720-1790), who was one of these writers, thought that the fragments discovered at Paestum intimated a style too 'stumpy' to be product of 'refined Grecian architecture'. According to Winckelmann's account, Paoli surmised that these buildings were 'Oriental', by which he meant Etruscan, because of their 'stumpy' proportions: Paoli asserted that these were 'even squatter than the canons of Vitruvius'.¹⁸ Paoli was describing Etruscan civilization and architecture as 'Oriental' because he believed the Etruscan derived from the Egyptian.

Piranesi did not, however, determine Egypt as a source for Roman architecture and leave it at that. He also exemplified the richness of Egyptian art and architecture through a large number of visual and literary works. One of his controversial works in

¹⁵ For a discussion of the Elgin Marbles and the crisis in aesthetic conception they produced in England, see Rochelle Gurstein, "The Elgin Marbles, Romanticism and the Waning of 'Ideal Beauty,'" *Daedalus* 131: 4 (Fall 2002): 88.

¹⁶ For Piranesi's training see Chapter 3, pp. 27-41.

¹⁷ For information on the journeys to Paestum and the geographical problems, see Rykwert, *First Moderns*, p. 268.

¹⁸ For Paoli's identification of the Etruscan as Oriental see Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art*, p. 30. For a discussion about this subject see Rykwert, *First Moderns*, pp. 270-71. It is also worth looking at the illustrations to Vitruvius in the Granger edition, vol. I: Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, edited from the Harleian Manuscript 2767, trans. Frank Granger (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1983).

this field, the *Parere*, published in 1765, mainly consists of the debate between scholar Didascalò (literally meaning ‘teacher’) and Protopiro (literally meaning ‘the first to set fire’). In the *Parere*, ‘Didascalò’ may have represented the Franciscan monk Lodoli or Piranesi himself. ‘Protopiro’ may have represented one from the opposite side of the debate which included Mariette, Laugier, Winckelmann, and Francesco Milizia (1725-1798).¹⁹ Contrary to Didascalò, which as a name contains no irony, the name of Protopiro bears sarcastic reference to the Greek Prometheus. In the dialogue, Didascalò represents the power of imagination in architecture as well as Piranesi’s conception of design which is based on the Egyptian-Etruscan styles and which we have seen critics to describe as ‘eclectic’ with respect to the history of dominant styles. Protopiro, on the other hand, tries, in the dialogue, to prove that the quality of ‘plain and noble beauty’, which Grecian architecture possesses, is superior to Roman architecture, especially to Piranesi’s conception of architecture, which, according to Protopiro, is ‘mere extravagant ornamentation’.²⁰

Nonetheless, Piranesi advocated the “functions of ornamentation” in buildings in the words by Didascalò:

Didascalò: So, it is Greece and Vitruvius? Very well: tell me, then, what do columns represent? Vitruvius says they are the forked uprights of huts; others describe them as tree trunks placed to support the roof. And the flutes on the columns: what do they signify? Vitruvius thinks they are the pleats in a matron’s gown. So the columns stand neither for forked uprights nor for tree trunks but for women placed to support a roof. Now what do you think about flutes? It seems to me that columns ought to be smooth. Therefore, take note: *smooth columns*. The forked uprights and tree trunks should be planted in the earth, to keep them stable and straight. Indeed that is how the Dorians thought of their columns. Therefore they should have no bases. Take note: *no bases*. The tree trunks, if they were used to support the roof, would be smooth and flat on top; the forked props can look like anything you like, except capitals. If that is not definite enough, remember that the capitals must represent solid things, not heads of men, maidens, or matrons, or baskets with foliage around them, or baskets topped with a matron’s wig. So take note: *no capitals*. Never fear; there are other rigorists who also call for smooth columns, no bases, and no capitals.

As for architraves, you want them to look either like tree trunks placed horizontally across the forked props or like beams laid out to span the tree trunks. So what is the point of the fasciae or of the band that projects from the surface? To catch the water and go rotten? Take note: *architraves with no fasciae and no band*.

What do the tryglyphs stand for? Vitruvius says that they represent the ends of the joists of ceilings or soffits. When they are placed at the corners of the building, however, not only do they belie this description but they can never be placed at regular intervals, because they have to be centred over the columns. If they are moved away from the corners, they can then be placed symmetrically only if the building is narrowed or widened with respect to the tryglyphs. It is

¹⁹ For Rykwert’s and Wilton-Ely’s different estimates of ‘Protopiro’, see Rykwert, *On Adam’s House in Paradise*, pp. 53-4; and Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, p. 51.

²⁰ For the dialogue between Didascalò and Protopiro see Piranesi, “*Parere su l’Architettura*,” in *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, pp. 102-14.

madness that a few small cuts on stone or mortar should dictate the proportions of a building, or that all or some of the due requirements of the building should be sacrificed to them. Thus, the ancient architects cited by Vitruvius held that temples ought not to be built in the Doric manner; better still, the Romans used the Doric without the added clutter. So take note: *friezes without trygliphs*. Now it is your turn, Signor Protopiro, to purge architecture of all the other ornaments that you disparaged just now.

Protopiro: What? Have you finished?

Didascalo: Finished? I have not even started. Let us go inside a temple, a palace, whatever you choose. Around the walls we shall observe architraves, friezes, and cornices adorned with those features that you just described as standing for the roof of a building—trygliphs, modillions, and dentils. And when those features are absent, and the friezes and cornices are smooth, even then the architraves and friezes will seem to support a roof and the cornices seem to be the eaves. These eaves, however, will drip rain inside the temple, the palace, or basilica. So the temple, the palace, or the basilica will be outside, and the outside inside, will they not? To rectify such anomalies, such travesties of architecture, take note: *internal walls of buildings with no architraves, friezes, and cornices*.

And then, on these cornices, which stand for eaves, vaults are erected. This is an even worse impropriety than those *episkēnia* on the roofs that we discussed a little while ago and that Vitruvius condemns.

Therefore take note: *buildings with no vaults*.

Let us observe the walls of a building from inside and outside. These walls terminate in architraves and all that goes with them above; below these architraves, most often we find engaged columns or pilasters. I ask you, what holds up the roof of the building? If the wall, then it needs no architraves, if the columns or pilasters, what is the wall there for? Choose, Signor Protopiro. Which will you demolish? The walls or the plasters? No answer? Then I will demolish the whole lot. Take note: *buildings with no walls, no columns, no pilasters, no friezes, no cornices, no vaults, no roofs*. A clean sweep.²¹

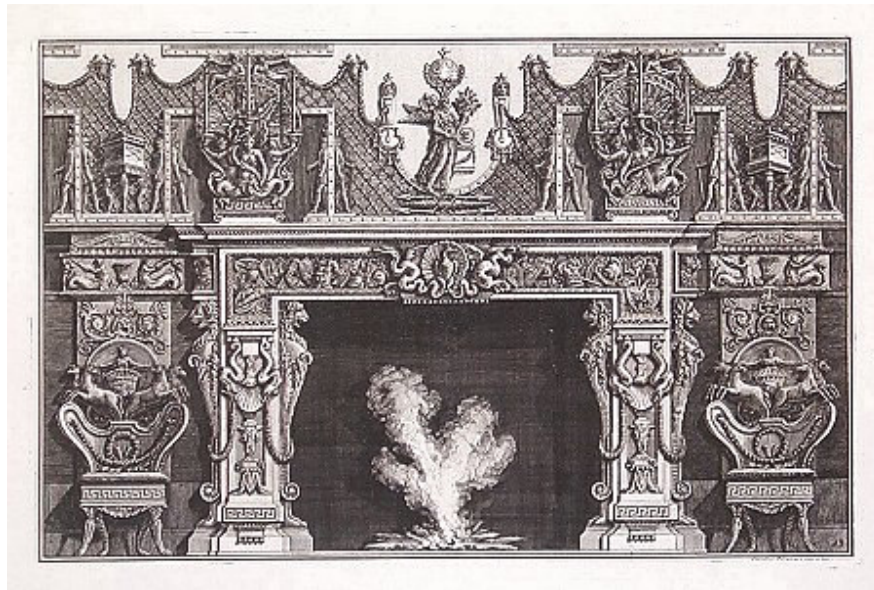


Figure 5.3. Chimney piece in Etruscan manner, *Diverse maniere*, 1769

The chimney piece in the Etruscan manner (Fig. 5.3) published in the *Diverse maniere* is a sample for the eclectic design approach expounded by Piranesi through the

²¹ Piranesi, *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, pp. 105-06.

interlocutor Didascolo. On the other hand, the drawing by Milizia (Fig. 5.4) reflects the manner of Greek purity advocated by Protopirol.²² It is also noteworthy that Piranesi's theoretical work in the *Parere* historically coincides with the realization of his only executed architectural work, Santa Maria del Priorato (1764-1766). Because of this coincidence, we may, in other words, surmise that Piranesi's "Opinions on Architecture" were put into practice through the 'renovation' of the Priorato.

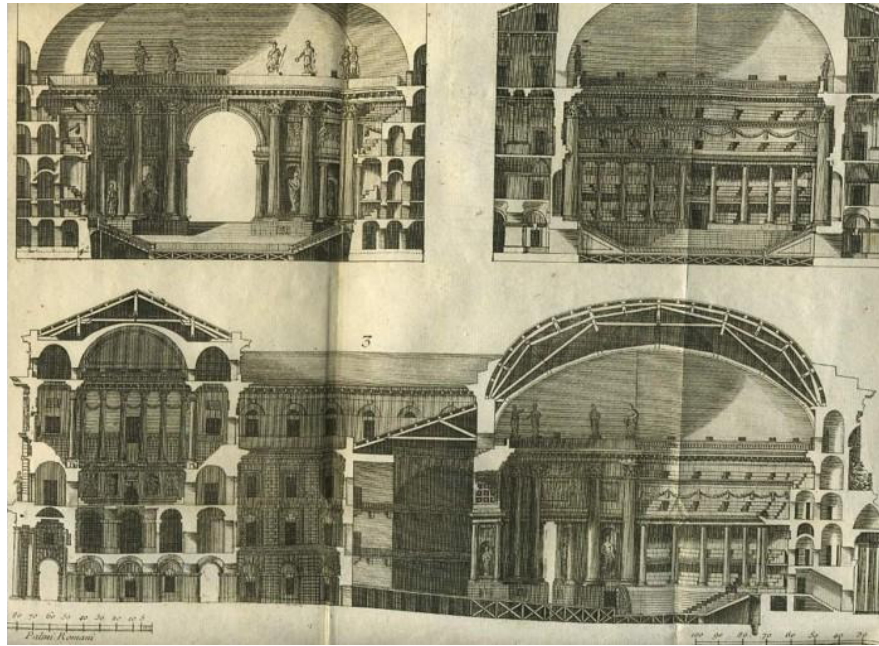


Figure 5.4. Francesco Milizia, drawing from the *Del Teatro*, 1773

We in fact come across the Egyptian obelisks (Fig. 5.5) between the walls enclosing the Priorato's piazza designed by Piranesi.²³ As seen in these examples, Piranesi's designs represent an 'eclectic' appearance at first glance. Nevertheless, it may be erroneous to describe Piranesi only as a figure representing the eclectic style. The fact that Piranesi combined design principles from different periods and cultures should be considered as the expression of his opinions regarding architectural history, and the lineage of interaction of architectural manners and styles. Piranesi considered this lineage to follow the order of Egyptian : Etruscan : Roman. In this context, similar to

²² Francesco Milizia, *Del Teatro* (Venice: Giambattista Pasquali, 1773).

²³ For a discussion about the obelisks in the piazza of Priorato see Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, pp. 55-56.

Father Paoli, Piranesi described the origins of the Roman architecture as ‘Oriental’. If, following Slavoj Zizek, we take historicism to be an ‘infinite chain of substitutions constructed upon the same foundation’,²⁴ for Piranesi, Egypt constituted the foundation of the historicist historiography of architecture he was establishing. However, Piranesi employed the description of ‘Oriental’ in a sense quite different from its modern use: he used the term from a cosmographic perspective that did not ascribe negative judgement, and thus was different from, say, Edward Said’s (1978) degrading meaning which the latter attributed to the whole of history. In this respect, as we shall see below, Piranesi pursued a history of architecture and a conception of design entirely different from that of a David Roberts (1796-1864).

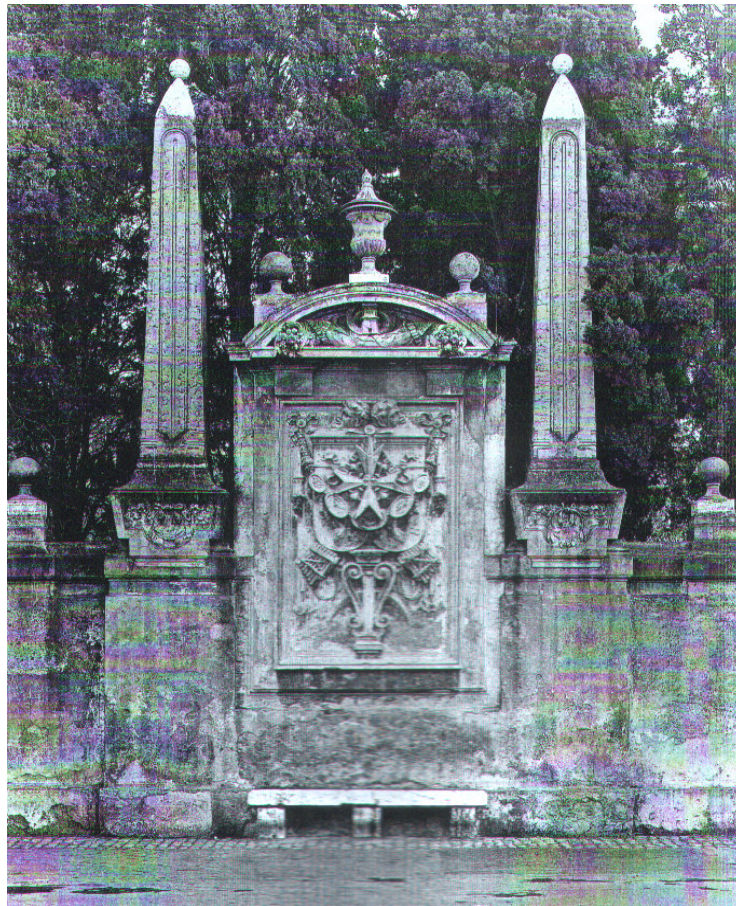


Figure 5.5. One of flanking *stelae* on the south wall, Santa Maria del Priorato, 1764-1766

²⁴ See Slavoj Zizek, “Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes Please,” in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, ed. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Zizek (London: Verso, 2000), p. 112.

5.2. Perception of ‘Orient’ in Piranesi

Piranesi’s perception of Egypt and Europe derived from an understanding of cosmography not much different than the one we find in antiquity. This cosmography did not yet contain a distinction between East and West. Hence, in the eighteenth century, it did not belong to a framework which placed Egypt in the East and Italy in the West, and which assumed that there was no permeability between one and the other. It is possible to represent the seamless continuity Piranesi comprehended between Italy and Egypt through the cosmography found in maps belonging to the period before the distinction between the East and the West. In fact, the world in Fig. 5.6 corresponds to such a perception of the world as can be gathered from the Homeric epics and Strabo of Amasia’s *Geographia* (7 BC-18/19 AD).²⁵ This particular cartographic conceptualization largely depends, however, on Dionysius of Alexandria’s *Periegetes* of 124 AD. The Greek title of the work literally means ‘about the world’ and was used so widely—above all as school text book—as to lend Dionysius the name of Dionysius Periegetes. Periegetes was the contemporary of Ptolamaeus and Marinus. The work describes the world in 1186 verse lines. In order to enable students to remember the places on the map, Dionysius had written the *Periegetes* in the manner of rhyming verse. Dionysius’ importance for our research lies in the fact that his cosmography

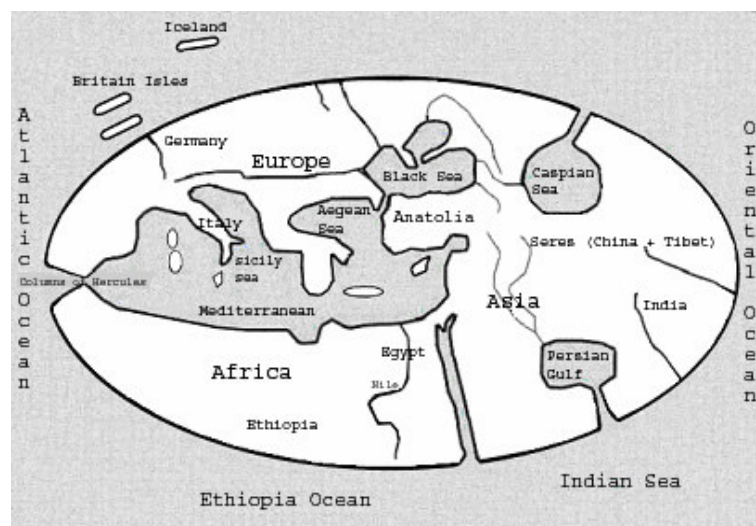


Figure 5.6. Cosmography around 124 AD

²⁵ In the reconstructions depicted in the maps in Fig. 5.6 and 5.7, the electronic publication entitled “Ancient Maps” at <http://www.henry-davis.com/MAPS/> was consulted on 06.01.2006.

endured and achieved prominence not only throughout Antiquity but also in the Latin Middle Ages.²⁶ The book was translated into Latin by Rufius Festus Avienus in the fourth century AD, and was employed as a standard reference source in Western Europe through the Middle Ages.²⁷ The world depicted in this book is but a single extended island not subject to an East-West division. It is a combination of the then known regions of the three continents of Asia, Europe and Africa. Piranesi was closer to Dionysius' Hellenistic world view of the second century AD which did not distinguish between East and West, and which found its centric point in Egypt.

The distinction between East and West emerged as a *geographical* distinction starting with the Romans. Ancient Romans used the terms *Europe* and *Asia* to define Eastern and Western halves of their territory. These terms served for militaristic and strategic purposes. The Latin word *Europea* had derived from the Greek term meaning 'vast' and 'large field'. While the Latin word *Europeenses* referred particularly to those people living in the regions to the west of Greece, the word *Asia*, again of Greek origin, was employed for territories of the Roman Empire including Anatolia. Literally meaning 'the place where the sun rises', the term *oriens* was invented by the Romans and was employed throughout the Hellenistic period and beyond. However, it did not carry any negative connotation. In the famous passage from Virgil's *Aeneid* of the first century BC, we come across both this word *oriens*—which may be translated as *east*—and the word *barbarian* meaning 'strange' or 'person not from Rome'. Contrary to critics' claims about the following passage,²⁸ the term 'east' below does not indicate a negative judgment of the East on the part of the Roman poet since what is shunned is adultery and what is protected is the military interest of Rome:

On the other side, with the wealth of the barbarian world and warriors in all kinds of different armour, came Anthony in triumph from the shores of the Red Sea and the people of the Dawn

²⁶ Strabo, *Geography*, ed. and trans. Horace Leonard Jones, Loeb Classical Library edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1917-32; 1969), II. C. 16.

²⁷ For information on Dionysius' work see E. H. Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography*, vol. II (London, 1879-1883), p. 490; and J. B. Harley, *The History of Cartography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), I: 172.

²⁸ For a claim about the negativity of Rome's judgment see Raymond Schwab, "The Orient: Word and Idea," *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe Rediscovery of India and the East 1680-1880* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 1.

[Orient]. With him sailed Egypt and the power of the East from as far as distant Bactria, and there bringing up the rear was the greatest outrage of all, his Egyptian wife!²⁹

As is known, for ancient Greeks, the word ‘barbarian’ (*bárbaros*) meant those ‘people who do not speak as we do’; gradually, it came to mean ‘strange’. Contrary to today’s widespread opinion, the word neither bore a despising meaning in itself nor was identified with brutality. It raised rather the question of communication and primarily signified a linguistic differentiation. Similarly, as if confirming that the criterion in barbarism was defined on the basis of communication, Hebrews designated Egyptians—people with whom they had been living together since archaic times—as *stutterers*.³⁰ In the *Poetics*, for instance, Aristotle provides the typology of common and proper nouns, and classifies words as ‘ordinary’, ‘strange’, ‘metaphorical’, ‘ornamental’, ‘invented’, ‘lengthened’, ‘curtailed’ and ‘altered’ (*Poetics*, 1457b2). Here, the category of ‘strange’ does not bear an ideological meaning. As a matter of fact, Aristotle provides an explanation following this classification, and states that what is a ‘strange’ word may vary according to user: “An ‘ordinary’ word is one used by everybody, a ‘strange’ word one used by some; so that a word may obviously be both ‘ordinary’ and ‘strange’, but not in relation to the same people” (*Poetics*, 1457b3).

When we look at historical notions on cosmography, we find that the geographical position of Egypt has borne importance in all historical periods. The distinguishing feature of Egypt for early historians and geographers was that it ‘disturbed’ the unity of the cosmography composed of three continuous continents. It disturbed, at least, the cartographic unity of the known Roman world: as we see in the cosmography represented in Fig. 5.6, the Nile River on the one hand, and the Red Sea on the other, which is already perceived as very wide, is like an incision in the whole. A close-up of the Nile and the Red Sea as described by Herodotus obtains the map in Fig. 5.7.³¹

²⁹ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, prose trans. and introduction David West (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990; 1991), VIII. 684-89.

³⁰ The example about the definition of Egyptians as *stutterers* by Hebrews is given by Schwab to defend an argument very different from ours: see Schwab, “The Orient: Word and Idea,” *The Oriental Renaissance*, p. 2. In our opinion, by following Said (1978) anachronistically, Schwab placed the disposition for despising the ‘other’ and especially the one classified as ‘eastern’ in all periods as in archaic culture. This disposition was developed in the eighteenth century and reached the peak by Modernism and today’s world views.

³¹ For Herodotus’ distinction see Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A. de Sélincourt (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), pp. 134-35.

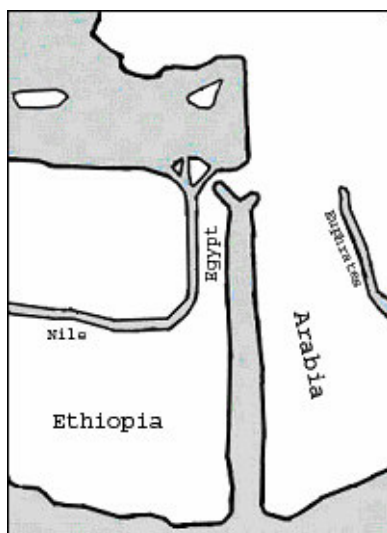


Figure 5.7. Asia - Africa distinction according to Herodotus, 450 BC

This tripartite continental cosmography taking Egypt as a point of gravity was transmitted from Herodotus to Dionysius, whence to the Middle Ages through Dionysius' Latin translations. From there, it was assimilated into theology in the Christian Middle Ages—at least in the Latin West. As if confirming our construction of a continuous itinerary of the unified view of the continents, medieval T-O maps represented a world again composed of Asia, Europe and Africa.³² T-O maps are termed thus by the Latin initials of the term for 'world': *terrarum orbis*. The designation distinguished world maps from regional maps. The letters of the map type, moreover, served the layered medieval semiotic as T represented the cross and O referred to the globe of the world itself. In these maps, three continents were placed together so as for the main volumes of water to form a T in the middle of the continents' O. The horizontal line of T was composed of the Mediterranean; the vertical line comprised the Red Sea, which had by now thickened even further as if to underscore its sacred significance and proportioned in order to create a vertical contrast with the Mediterranean. In these maps, the Nile River and the Red Sea were sometimes united to thicken the vertical axis of the letter T. The T was placed like a cross, within the circle of the world sphere (of the O).

An early example to this type of map is the exceedingly stylized map of Isidore (570-636 AD) dated to the seventh century (Fig. 5.8). *Etymologiarum sive Originum*

³² For T-O maps of the Middle Ages see George Kimble, *Geography of the Middle Ages* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), p. 23.

libri XX ('Twenty Books on Etymologies and Origins') by Isidore was one of the most widely consulted texts of the early Middle Ages. In this map the earth is placed inside a circle in which the phrase 'ocean sea' (*oceanum mare*) is inscribed. The East (*Oriēs* or *Oriens*) is depicted at the top and the West (*occidēs* or *occidens*) at the bottom. The most important direction, signifying the rising point of the sun, *Oriens* displays a capital initial and in accordance with its theological importance, is placed at the top—where modern maps place the north—of the space of representation. Apart from the south (*Meri.:* *Meridianus*) and the north (*Sep.:* *Septemtrio*), the continents of *Asia*, *Europe* and *Africa* are also indicated in Isidore's map. *Shem*, *Japheth* and *Ham* refer to the regions to where the three sons of Noah migrated after the Flood had subsided. The map indicates that the sons of Shem comprised the people of Asia, the sons of Japheth comprised the people of Europe, and the sons of Ham comprised the people of Africa. Thus, the grounds upon which the unified tripartite cosmography of the continents protected its continuity during the Christian Middle Ages is laid bare: the three continents were combined under the ancestry of Noah. *Mare magnũ* (*mare magnum*: the great sea), the Mediterranean; *meoti palus* (*Maeotis palus*), Gulf of Azov; *Nillus flu.* (*Nillus flumen*), the Nile River; *Tanais flum* (*Tanais flumen*), the Don River signify the water masses in the map. Isidore's map may be represented by placing the north to the top as in Fig. 5.9. The map emphasizes the cross by accepting the Don River as a continuum to the Nile.

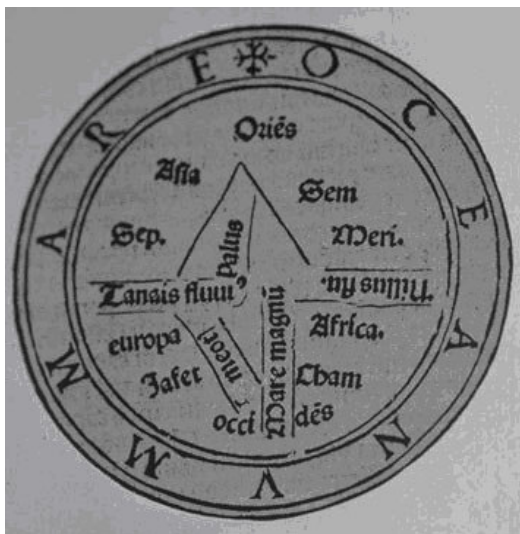


Figure 5.8. Isidore, T-O map, *Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX*

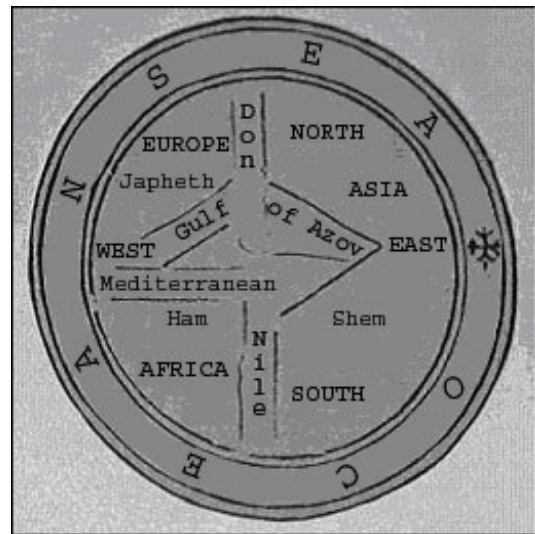


Figure 5.9. Isidore's T-O map translated into English with north at the top

In the map in Fig. 5.10, the shape of O is circumscribed by the ‘shape of the universe’ which was the principle architectonic form of Gothic culture which referred to the silhouette of the Gothic cathedral in the thirteenth century. The T-O route in Isidore’s map can also be seen in the detailed map by Hereford. T-O maps, the perception of the tripartite continental cosmography expressed by these maps, and more importantly, their feature of rejecting any political or cultural hierarchy between the continents were still current issues in the work entitled *La Sfera* (circa 1420) written by Leonardo Dati, prominent Italian historicist of the early fifteenth century. Even after the discovery of America, these features still survived as seen in the 1628 work entitled *Variae orbis universi* by Petrus Bertius.³³

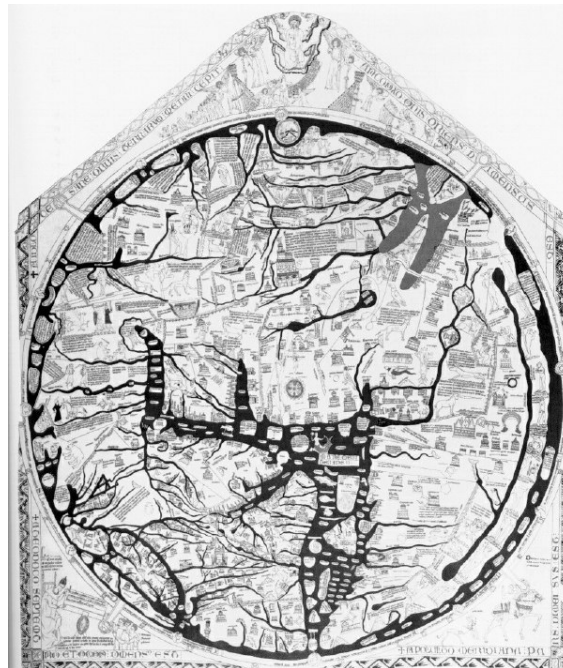


Figure 5.10. *Hereford mappa mundi* (Hereford world map), 1290, Library of Hereford Cathedral

Similarly, Dionysius’ cosmography preserved its continuity until the threshold of Piranesi’s culture: the work entitled *Dionysii orbis descriptio* (Dionysius’ world description: Fig. 5.11), published in 1697 in Oxford, contained the original text in Greek and its Latin translation. Besides, it included a preface by Gerardus Joannes Vossius

³³ For references to T-O maps see M. Destombes, *Mappemondes, A.D. 1200-1500 via Monumenta Cartographica vetustioris aevi: Catalogue prepare par la Commission des Cartes Anciennes de l’Union Geographique Internationale* (Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1964), pp. 29-34, 54-64; and Harley, *The History of Cartography*, pp. 255, 301-303, 320, 343.

(1577-1649), the famous scientist; notes by Andreas Papius (1552-1581) published first in 1575, and other important glosses and additions. The cover picture in the edition prepared by Edward Thwaites (1667-1711) shows the three continents of Europe, Asia, Africa in three niches integrated in classical architectonic style which would be sustained through the late seventeenth century and eighteenth century. During the Renaissance and subsequent periods, the idea of unity of the three continents still survived in spite of the rapidly changing cosmographic and cartographic notions in the culture of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Descartes.³⁴

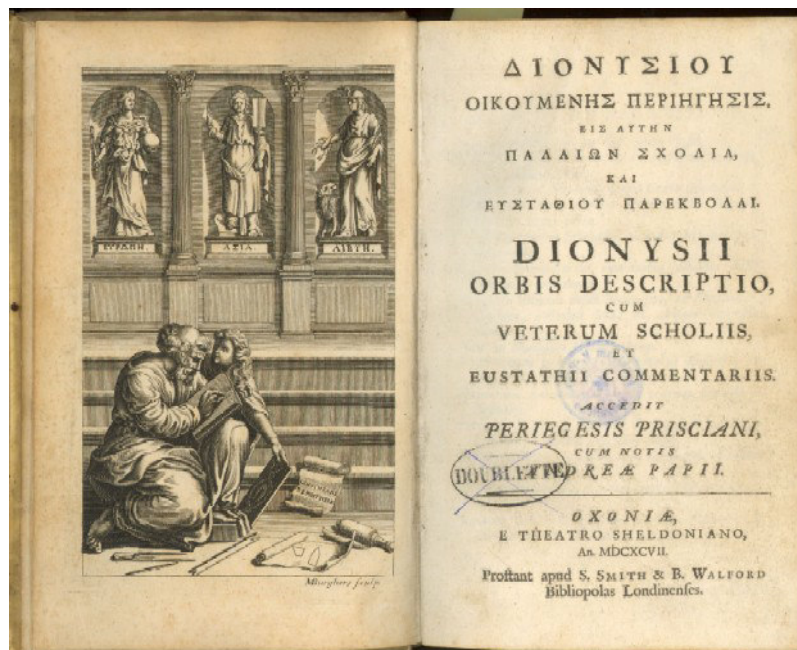


Figure 5.11. *Dionysii orbis descriptio*, cover pages, 1697

Hence, as we approach the threshold of Piranesi's culture, we find still surviving a cosmographic tradition rejecting the division of continents. The continental division was going to emerge along with the developing East-West division in the eighteenth century, as colonialist objectives crystallize. Nevertheless, Greece was accepted as *East* even by Winckelmann who praised Greece and who rejected rooting European culture in Egypt. The division between *East* and *West* deepened the eighteenth century wore on.

³⁴ For changing cosmographic and cartographic notions in the Renaissance and subsequent periods, see Jacques Merleau-Ponty, and Bruno Morando, *The Rebirth of Cosmology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 63-96.

5.3. Piranesi and Scientific Method

Piranesi declared Egyptian civilization as the root of not only the Etruscan and Roman, but also the Grecian. Thus Egypt lay in the background of all modern European architecture. He explicitly illustrated this argument by showing Roman architecture to ‘lean on’ the Egyptian. Especially his series *Varie Vedute* published in 1745 evince examples of such illustration. The drawings entitled *Pyramid of Cestius* in this series in turn represent the most expressive examples for Piranesi’s controversial arguments on the origin of the Roman civilization: in one of these drawings, given in Fig. 5.12, a Romanesque building is depicted in front of a pyramid as if it were ‘leaning’ on the pyramid at its (the Romanesque building’s) left corner. The shadow of the Romanesque building is cast upon the surface of the pyramid, albeit without either ‘distorting’ or ‘disturbing’ the older structure’s magnificence. The positioning of these two architectures as one concretely as one ‘following’ the other indicates both Piranesi’s consideration of their chronological emergence, and translate into drawing the notion that Roman architecture derives from Egyptian.

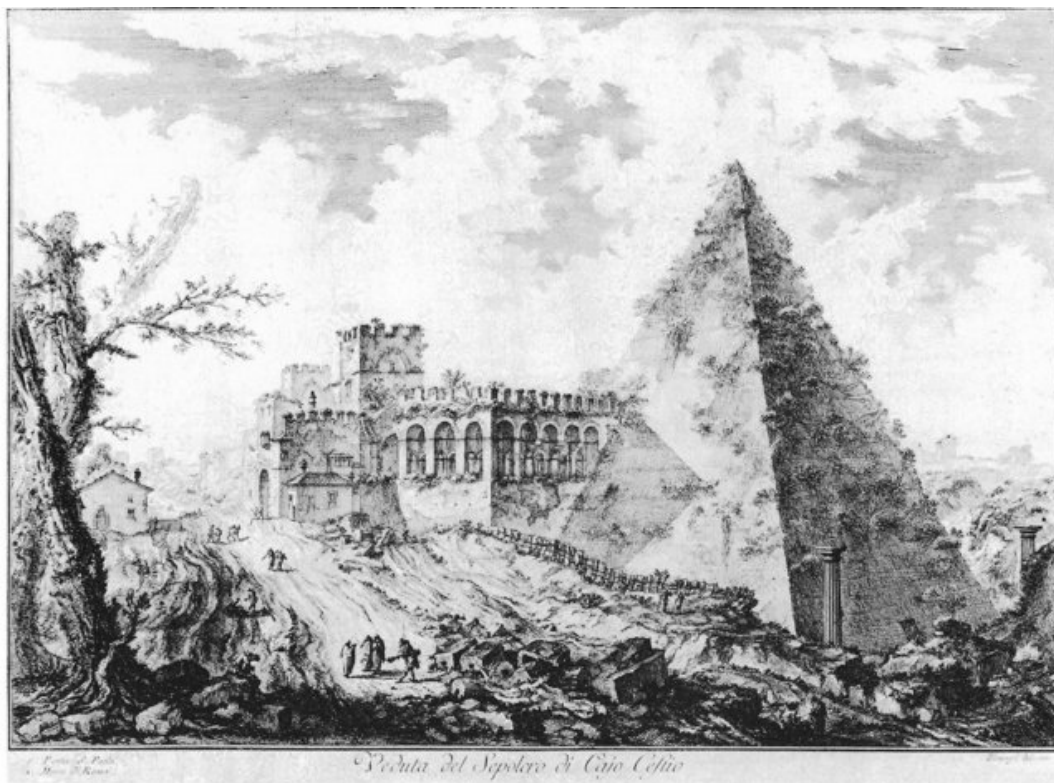


Figure 5.12. *Pyramid of Cestius, Varie Vedute*, 1750

The importance attributed to Egypt both in drawings and in textual arguments by Piranesi has been considered as a stylistic indulgence for Egypt, as following up a fashion rather than comprising theses on the history of architecture. This perception also continues today as it has during the nineteenth century.³⁵ Even Wittkower interpreted the importance of Egypt for Piranesi as *Egyptomania*.³⁶ Moreover, the historical priority and ancestral status attributed to Egypt by Piranesi was seen as an ‘Orientalist inclination’ of him rather than a historical perception reaching beyond current ideologies and fashion.³⁷ Among the masterpieces of Piranesi, two series of the *Carceri* are also important in this context, because they were accepted by the said critics as conveying ‘Oriental’ or ‘barbaric’ influences (Fig. 2.4, 5.13). The first *Carceri* series was published in 1745 under the title of *Invenzioni capricci di carceri*, and the second was published in 1760 under the title of *Carceri d’invenzione*, as mentioned in Chapter 2. ‘Sublimity’ generated by pathos is felt in both of the series. On the other hand, fragmented buildings defeated by time and overgrown by plants, and frustrated human beings scattered among the crumbling stones and torture tools are the dominant elements especially in the second *Carceri* series. In this respect, the *Carceri* series visualize the definition of the *sublime* provided by Kant and Burke.³⁸ According to Said, the view of the *Carceri* bearing “oriental” influences was designed in a “barbaric” manner (Fig. 2.4, 5.13), which highlighted and represented conditions like those experienced in “barbaric” Oriental countries.³⁹ Perhaps the last thing that can be said about the *Carceri* is that it is “Orientalist.” If the series would be evaluated within a socio-political frame, then research should be directed at the Europe of Piranesi’s day.

³⁵ For the nineteenth century interpretations of Piranesi’s tendency to Egypt, see Fletcher, *A History of Architecture*, pp. 846, 919.

³⁶ For Wittkower’s interpretation of Piranesi’s Egyptian view see his “Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania,” pp. 259-73.

³⁷ For the interpretations implying Piranesi as ‘Oriental’, see Penny, *Piranesi*, pp. 10, 16; Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 128-9; Tafuri, *Sphere and Labyrinth*, p. 47; and Rykwert, *First Moderns*, p. 363.

³⁸ For Kant’s and Burke’s descriptions about the sublime see Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, pp. 47-54; and Burke, *Origin of Our Ideas of The Sublime and Beautiful*, pp. 45-47, 51, 101-102. These will be taken up in detail in the next chapter.

³⁹ *Orientalism*, pp. 128-29. Said’s interpretation seems unfounded and improbable, and more indicative of a late twentieth-century Palestinian writer’s view of events in the eastern (Middle-Eastern) geography. Piranesi’s *Carceri* series are infinitely more complicated than the above cited judgement grasps. For similar critiques on the *Carceri* see Penny, *Piranesi*, p. 11.



Figure 5.13. Plate IX, *Invenzioni capricci di carceri*, 1745

Eighteenth-century Europe was troubled and directed towards the year 1789 at full speed. Between the years of 1745 and 1760, when the *Carceri* series were produced, Italy was divided due to the War of the Spanish Succession; Sicily was given to the Duke of Savoia, and Naples to the King of Spain. At the end of the War of the Austrian Succession, Lombardy was left to the Habsburgs; and with the end of the sovereignty of the Medici family, Tuscany was given to the Duke of Lorrain. These ‘foreign’ governors were disrupting Italy’s traditional systems in economics, taxation and guilds. Traditional systems including the penal code collapsed and new criminal laws brought into force. Furthermore, Italy was going to see Napoleon’s invasion, be scene to wars between Austria and France, and surrender a great part of land—including Venice—to France. While violence, crisis and upheaval were shaking Italy, Piranesi was drawing his *Carceri* series.⁴⁰ In other words, it was not necessary for Piranesi to travel to the ‘east’ in order to see or represent barbarism. In this historical moment, Italian intellectual groups including Piranesi himself were to coalesce in the movement against the penal system, particularly against capital punishment. Italians were exceedingly active in the movements of the humanization of the penal practice and abolishment of capital punishment—which were among the main projects of the

⁴⁰ Perhaps the most important historicist of the eighteenth-century Italy was still Franco Venturi. See Franco Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment, Studies in a Cosmopolitan Century* (London: Longman, 1972).

Enlightenment. Even Voltaire (1694-1778) had observed that, “it may well be that the Italians are ahead of us.”⁴¹ Nonetheless, the Italian Penal Code that was developed by the end of the century was to be accepted as the most humanistic penal system until recent times. Four years after the publication of Piranesi’s second *Carceri* series, in 1764, Cesare Beccaria was going to publish his work on Crime and Punishment which was going to be translated into twenty two languages within a short time. In Fig. 5.14, the illustration on the inner-cover of this book—which was translated into English in the same year—is seen. The drawing depicts rejection of capital punishment.



Figure 5.14. Cesare Beccaria, *On Crimes and Punishment*, 1764

In other words, the violence and ‘barbarism’ criticized in Piranesi’s *Carceri* series were, in fact, a violence and ‘barbarism’ Italians could observe right at home. The Scottish landscape painter David Roberts, who painted views of Egypt (Fig. 5.15) and

⁴¹ Voltaire’s words were quoted from Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500-1900* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 198.

Jerusalem,⁴² was perhaps a better example for Said and Penny, than Piranesi, since he believed that models of wildness and barbarism could only be seen in Oriental countries. Roberts detested Muslims and their barbarism which had caused great cities to deteriorate:

Splendid cities, once teeming with a busy population and embellished with temples and edifices, the wonder of the world, now deserted and lonely, or reduced by mismanagement and the barbarism of the Muslim creed to a state as savage as wild animals by which they are surrounded. Often have I gazed on them till my heart actually sickened within me.⁴³

For Said and Penny, as said, Roberts may have presented a more useful source than Piranesi. As a matter of fact, it is easier to find examples of Said's view of Orientalism in the nineteenth century when Roberts also lived.



Figure 5.15. David Roberts, *Fragments of the Great Colossi at the Memnonium*, 1847

Most of Piranesi's designs are full of pure Egyptian figures as we observe in the series of the *Parere* and the *Diverse maniere* (Fig. 5.16 and 5.17). Approaching architecture from the historical perspective, witnessing the founding period of the discipline of the history of architecture and contributing highly to this discipline, Piranesi was also one of the members of the discipline of archaeology which was newly

⁴² David Roberts, *Egypt, Nubia & the Holy Land*, Catalogue (Seattle: Davidson Galleries, 2004).

⁴³ Robert's explanation was quoted from Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myth of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 11.

emerging. As expected during the emergence phase of disciplines and scientific discourses, the adjacent human sciences like archaeology, history of art and architecture, and linguistics had not yet reached the kind of division they were going to reach at the end of the nineteenth century. Like Winckelmann, Piranesi thinking and working within this wide range of disciplines. Hence, Piranesi's drawings in pure Egyptian manner may be regarded both as archaeological works and, at a time when the discovery of the pyramids had not yet been completed, as 'findings' visualized by means of imagination and intuition based on historical information. If we remember that the discovery of the Egyptian pyramids and archaeological investigations were realized in 1798-1799 during Napoleon's Egyptian expedition,⁴⁴ we shall have better understanding regarding what kind of attention *and* imagination produced the chimneypiece of 1769.

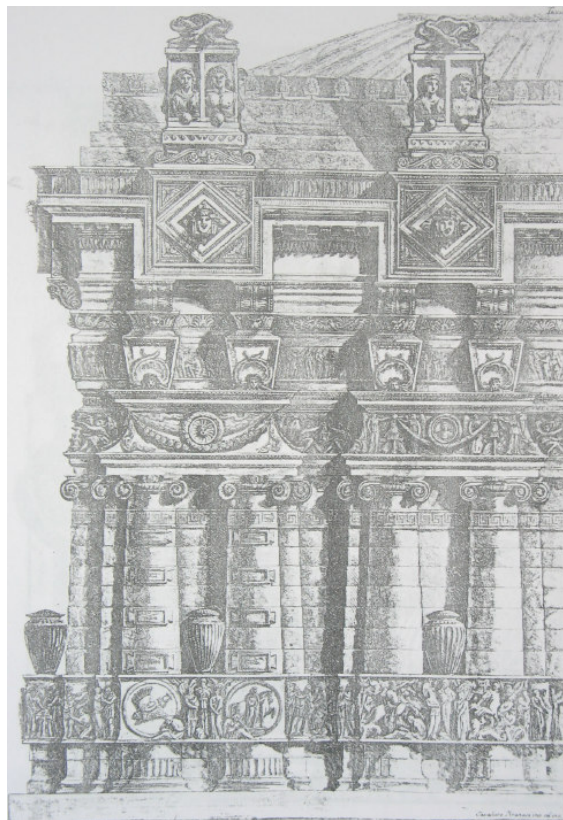


Figure 5.16. Plate VI, *Parere*, 1765

⁴⁴ For Napoleon's Egyptian expedition see Wittkower, "Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania," p. 272.

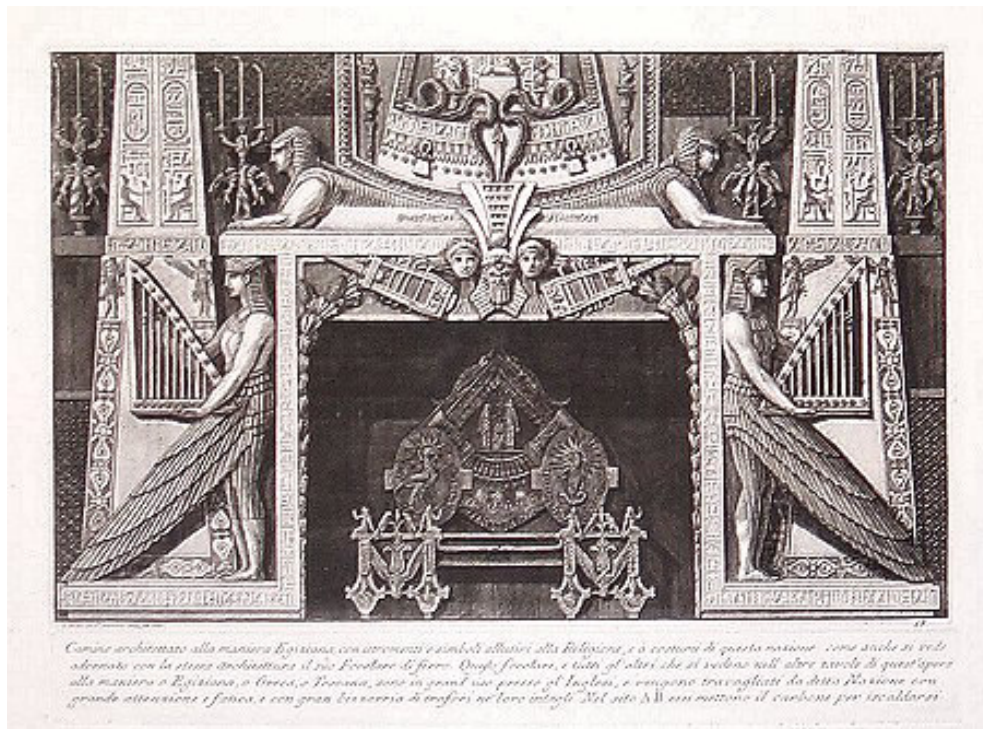


Figure 5.17. Chimneypiece in Egyptian manner, *Diverse maniere*, 1769

Nonetheless, the drawing of *Pianta del Serraglio delle fiere fabbricato da Dominiziano per uso dell'Anfiteatro* (Fig. 5.18) from the series *Antichità* (1756) reflects Piranesi's imagination, and meticulous research at excavation sites. Piranesi could imagine and draw the substructures of *Pianta del Serraglio* which had not yet been excavated in Piranesi's time. After these covered parts were excavated, it was seen that Piranesi's drawings were in accordance with the measurements of the real structure.⁴⁵ Furthermore, especially the *Antichità* and *Campo* series indicated Piranesi's inclination towards engineering. In the *Antichità*, for example, he drew the construction processes of the buildings and even the devices used in these constructions in full detail (Fig. 5.19). Of course, apart from his inclination to engineering, here, the attention peculiar to a historicist also appears. A type of visual dictionary (Fig. 5.20) published in the *Diverse maniere* including the Etruscan motifs also signifies Piranesi's systematic observation of archaeological excavations.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of Piranesi's drawing of the *Pianta del Serraglio* (mentioned as *Curia Hostilia* by Wilton-Ely) see Wilton-Ely, *Mind and Art*, p. 57; and for scientific sensibility in Piranesi's architectural drawings see Girón, "Drawing and Construction Analysis," pp. 74-76.

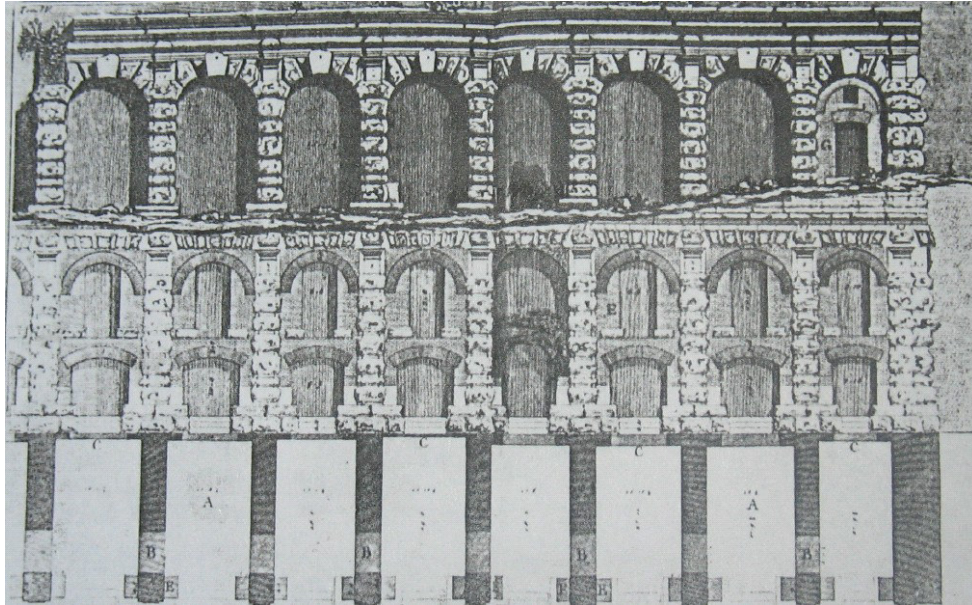


Figure 5.18. *Pianta del Serraglio delle fiere fabbricato da Dominiziano per uso dell'Anfiteatro*, showing substructure which was buried in Piranesi's time, *Antichità*, IV, 1756

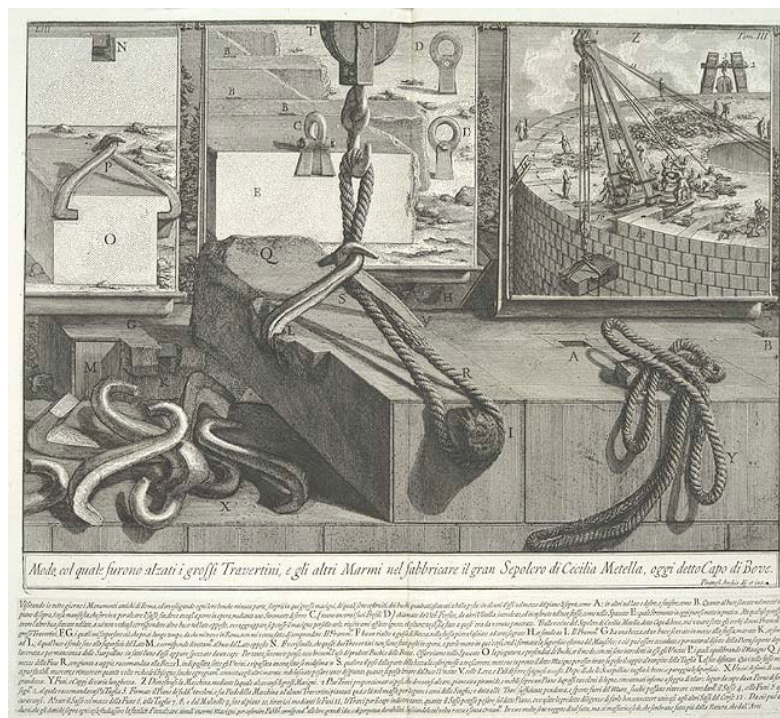


Figure 5.19. *Modo col quale furono alzati i grossi Travertini, e gli altri Marmi nel fabbricare il gran Sepolcro di Cecilia Metella, oggi detto Capo di Bove* (The means by which the large travertine blocks and other marbles were lifted in the construction of the Great Tomb of Cecilia Metella, today called *Capo di Bove*), Plate LIII, first edition, *Antichità*, III, 1756



Figure 5.20. A type of visual dictionary showing inventions attributed to Etruscans by Piranesi, *Diverse maniere*, 1769

There are scholars appraising Piranesi's scientific sensibility and achievements in spite of inadequate facilities in the eighteenth century.⁴⁶ There is, however, a question that needs to be explained in the Western history of architecture: the fact that some scholars criticized Piranesi for being 'Orientalist', as we see above, and for not being

⁴⁶ For positive interpretations of Piranesi's drawing technique and scientific sensibility see Oechslin, "Piranesi to Libeskind," pp. 15-35; and Girón, "Drawing and Construction Analysis," pp. 74-76.

scientific as Jennifer Bloomer and Serge Conard did.⁴⁷ Piranesi foresaw the critique of his work, and replied to present and future critics who were suspicious about the scientific character of his arguments, in the introduction of *Campo*: “I am rather afraid that parts of the Campus which I describe should seem figments of my imagination and not based on any evidence” (*Campo*, xi).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ For negative interpretations of Piranesi’s scientific sensibility see Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, pp. 70-72; and Serge Conard, “De l’architecture de Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, considérée dans ses rapports avec Piranesi,” *Piranèse et les français, Colloque Tenu à la Villa Médicis, 12-14 Mai 1976*, ed. Georges Brunel (Rome: Edizioni dell’elefante, 1978), pp. 168-70. Also see Marshall, “Piranesi, Juvarra and the Triumphal Bridge Tradition,” p. 338n.155.

⁴⁸ Piranesi’s original words in the *Campo* are as follows: “Sebbene ciò di che io piuttosto temer dubio, si è, che non sembrano inventate a capriccio, più che prese dal vero, alcune cose di questa delianezione del Campo.”

CHAPTER 6

PIRANESI BETWEEN CLASSICAL AND SUBLIME

6.1. Against a *vil métier*

The eighteenth century saw an increasing number of debates and polemics in aesthetical theory. One of these concerned the difference between the beautiful and the sublime, which influenced especially philosophical approaches to art and design in poetry, music, painting, as well as in architecture. Two philosophers contributing to the discussion, Kant and Burke, had diverse views on the pair including such questions as their origins and inherence while agreeing that they were essential to appreciating human creativity. Architects and artists, moreover, utilized the notions of beautiful and sublime in their work both literarily in their writings and visually in design. In this lively environment flourishing around the concepts of the beautiful and the sublime, Piranesi etched in 1765 the fragment of a statement on the sublime by Le Roy. The fragment came from Le Roy's 1758 *Ruines* and Piranesi placed the words on the inscription plate at the centre of the façade, directly above the entrance of the building he was depicting. The etching was published in Plate VIII of his dialogue *Parere* (Fig. 6.1): “Pour ne pas faire de cet art sublime un vil métier où l'on ne feroit que copier sans choix”: ‘In order not to render this sublime art a vile craft where one would only copy without discretion’.¹ The wider context of Le Roy's words in *Ruines* had called for discretion on the architect's part in situating himself between blind compliance with classical norm and ‘accepting no rules whatsoever’ (“n'admettre aucunes règles”) in the design of monuments.² Le Roy had further warned that,

A fair appreciation of these principles should help us avoid two very dangerous improprieties in architecture: that of accepting no rules whatsoever and taking caprice as the only guide in the composition of Monuments; and that of accepting too many [rules]; constraining thereby

¹ Piranesi, “*Parere su l'architettura*,” in *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette*, pp. 139, 152-153n.139.

² Le Roy, *Ruines*, p. 1.

Architects' imagination and making of this sublime Art a species of craft in which each only copies, without discretion, that which has been done by some ancient Architects.³

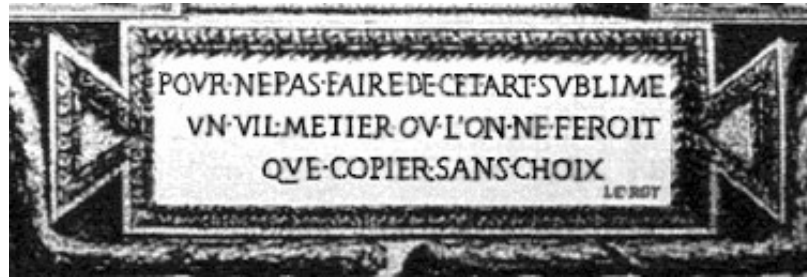


Figure 6.6. Plate VIII, *Parere*, detail showing Le Roy's statement, 1765

Le Roy was using the term *sublime* to describe the architecture of *monuments*. Piranesi had used Le Roy's statement as the central inscription of precisely a monument, identifying *sublime architecture* with architecture of monuments (Fig. 6.2).

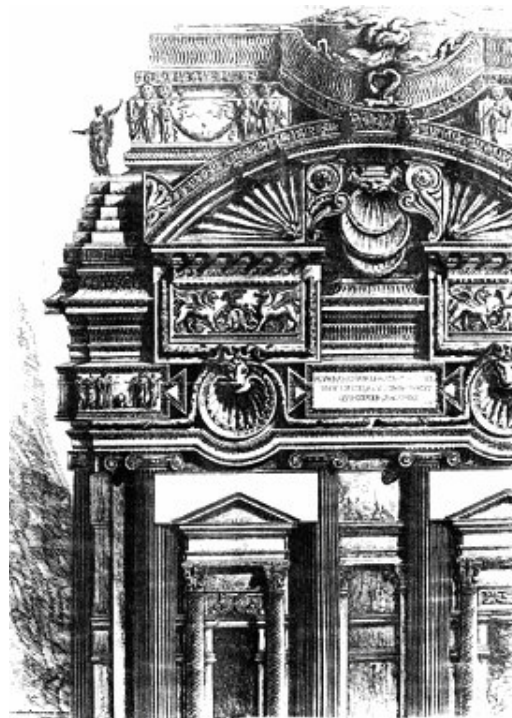


Figure 6.7. Plate VIII, *Parere*, 1765

³ "Un juste appréciation de ces principes nous feroit éviter deux inconvénients très-dangereux dans l'Architecture, celui de n'admettre aucunes règles, et de ne prendre pour guide, dans la composition des Monuments que le caprice; et celui d'en admettre un trop grand nombre; de gêner par-la l'imagination des Architectes, et de faire de ce Art sublime un espèce de métier ou chacun ne feroit que copier, sans choix, ce qui a été fait par quelques Architectes anciens." Le Roy, *Ruines*, p. 1.

Piranesi had also changed slightly Le Roy's statement in order to render it more emphatic, substituting "un vil métier" (a vile craft) for Le Roy's more neutral "un espèce de métier" (a species of craft). Le Roy too, however, had conceived of dogged compliance with classical norm as something lowly—a kind of 'craft' rather than Art. Both Piranesi and Le Roy were obviously within the bounds of eighteenth-century European culture in their view of a hierarchic distinction between art (*art*) and craft (*métier*).⁴ While the profession of architecture had since Vitruvius been considered to be equally art and craft (*De arch.* Book I: II-III C.), the eighteenth century was increasingly separating the two domains and establishing a hierarchical relationship between them in which art superseded craft. The result was discussion in architectural environments as to the implications of this new division for the discipline. Le Roy, as we saw, was alerting that the artist-architect could commit faults that would degrade the architectural work into craft. Piranesi's paraphrase of Le Roy with *vil métier* went further and described *craft* as 'vile' or 'lowly', identified mimetic architecture with craft, and made the difference between sublime architecture and classical imitation even more trenchant. By identifying architecture of monuments with a particular, elevated, style, however, both Piranesi and Le Roy participated in a hierarchic genre theory that remained Aristotelian, i.e., classical, as the very notion of generic hierarchy was and is classical.

Thus the eighteenth-century debate on the beautiful and sublime concerned architecture in a particular way: it engaged the distinction between 'beautiful architecture' and 'sublime architecture' with a view on the degree of presence of classical rules as opposed to freedom from these rules and identified their difference as the gap between 'Art' and 'craft'. The latter was furthermore identified with the imitation—*mimesis*—of classical architecture. Refraining from entering into a discussion of the art/craft distinction as this has been excellently conducted elsewhere,⁵

⁴ The typifying and familiar example for the distinction would be Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* of 1751, in particular the entries *métier*, *art*, and *architecture*, the first two written by Denis Diderot and the last one by François Blondel: see Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert, *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 35 vols. (Paris, 1751). See also Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*, pp. 166-67, 172.

⁵ For the history of the distinction on art/craft from Antiquity through the eighteenth century, see Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*, pp. 166-74; Rykwert, *First Moderns*, p. 297. But we must also add that since the Renaissance, architects, painters and sculptors had been arguing for the right of their discipline to be registered as art since, unlike craftsmen, artists could be knighted. Also, artists paid no or less tax depending on regional or national law. See Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940; 1962), pp. 48-57.

this chapter investigates Piranesi's drawings of sublime architecture against the background of the contemporary philosophical debate on the beautiful and sublime, and situates the eighteenth-century notion of sublime architecture in terms of the culture's revisionary, but ambiguous, attitude to classicism. Piranesi should prove particularly significant in the said context as this prolific architect of the sublime equally included the classical in his work as, among others, Plate VIII of the *Parere* evinced (Fig. 6.2). This inclusion, as we saw, was part of his perception of 'entire history'.⁶ But his treatment of the classical at once revealed the instability of the classical itself.⁷ This chapter demonstrates, among other things, that an instabilizing vector of reflection was handed down by the classical tradition itself.

6.2. A Different Classic

Like seventeenth-century classicists, eighteenth century Neo-Classicalists drew on Aristotle's *Poetics*, and to some extent his *Rhetoric*, in areas that required composition and design ranging from poetry and music to architecture, dance, and sculpture. Regardless of whether one had thoroughly read and glossed Aristotle, like Charles Le Brun (1619-1690), Charles-Alphonse Du Fresnoy (1611-1665), and Antonio Palomino (1655-1726) or not, the Aristotelian rules were received with equal firmness through the shop tradition.⁸ What that tradition had handed down as 'classical norm' derived, through sixteenth- and seventeenth-century interpretations, from the notions of *order*, *decorum* (propriety), and other compositional concepts in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1367a, 1404b 8-12, 1405a 10-14) and the three unities contained in the *Poetics* (1447b, 1448a). The Aristotelian conceptions were also handed down through several other interim authors like Democritus (460 BC-370 BC) and Lucretius (94 BC-49 BC) and

⁶ Interpretation of Piranesi's inclusion in the Neo-Classical circles of the mid-century was offered above, in Chapter 3, pp. 43-45.

⁷ For an extensive discussion of this aspect of Piranesi's approach to the classical, see Stanley Allen, "Piranesi and Duchamp: The Fictional Present," *Pratt Journal of Architecture* 2 (1988): 55-58.

⁸ Charles Le Brun, "L'expression des passions & autres conférences," *The Expression of the Passions*, trans. Julien Philippe (1668; Paris: Editions Dédale, 1994); Charles-Alphonse Du Fresnoy, *De Arte graphica. The art of painting*, trans. J. Dryden (1668; London: Bernard Lintot, 1773); Antonio Palomino, *Theórica de la pintura* (1715; Madrid: Lucas Antonio Bedmar, 1988).

determined the continuity of the discourse on classicism in the architectural sphere.⁹ What set the eighteenth century apart from the previous centuries, however, was the additional availability of and importance attached to two ancient works. These comprised for one, the availability of Vitruvius in readable, annotated editions and translations. Vitruvius had assimilated the Aristotelian norms of classicism fully into the discourse of architecture and demonstrated the mode of their practicability (*De arch.* Book V: IV C. 3). Equally significant for our purposes, however, is the importance increasingly attached in the eighteenth century to Longinus' first century AD *On the Sublime*.

Le Roy's alerting to errors that might deter from sublimity for example, derived from Longinus, whose book began with an analysis of faults.¹⁰ Fundamental terms such as 'greatness', 'strength', 'nobility', and 'dignity' which Kant, Burke, Piranesi, and others employed in the discussion of the sublime and in distinguishing it from the beautiful, equally owed to Longinus (*On sub.* 1.1, 5, 9.2-3, 12.3 *et passim*). These terms could of course be found in Aristotle and Vitruvius (*Poet.* 1447b, 1448a; *Rhet.* 1361b 12, 1393a 26, 1408a 7; *De arch.* Book V: IV C. 3, Book I: II C. 3-7). Longinus too, had incorporated elements of the Aristotelian tradition.¹¹ But in Longinus they had become, beyond terms, essential concepts in the appreciation of creative or imaginative work that so excelled as to warrant deviation from the rule, and were assimilated in the eighteenth century into the domain of architectural and visual works. In the course of the eighteenth century, roughly speaking, Aristotle was going to come to be identified with classicism and the 'beautiful' while Longinus was going to serve as conceptual and validating source for a sphere of design that underscored freedom from rules, which would yield the 'sublime'.

A qualification is in order, however—one articulated by Piranesi's near contemporaries themselves: they were not content with the rendition of Longinus' *hypsous* as 'sublime' and in their discussion of the translation of the term into the

⁹ For Aristotelian conceptions in Democritus and Lucretius, see Hermann Diels, and Walter Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1951), 68B125; Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura, On the Nature of Things*, trans. W. D. H. Rouse (London: William Heinemann, 1975; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 3.94, 4.26.

¹⁰ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. W. H. Fyfe, in *Aristotle, The Poetics. Longinus, On the Sublime. Demetrius, On Style*, pp. 3-5. References to this work will be henceforward indicated in parentheses in the text.

¹¹ For Aristotelian conceptions in Longinus see Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm*, p. 18.

vernacular, they also generated definitions of the term: finding ‘sublime’ too narrow for rendering the original term, William Wordsworth (1770-1850) wrote that, “Longinus treats of animated, impassioned, energetic, or, if you will, elevated writing [...]. His *hypsous* when translated ‘sublimity’ deceives the English reader by substituting an etymology for a translation.”¹² Similarly René Rapin had written in 1701 in his “Du grand ou du sublime dans les moeurs et dans les différentes conditions des homes” (On the grand or the sublime in the mores and the different conditions of men): ‘I make this sublime consist of the highest summit of perfection, which is the supreme stage of excellence in each condition’.¹³ In either case, Longinus’ term was identified with an excellence of design and composition in the grand style. These discussions demonstrate not only the importance attached to Longinus in Piranesi’s culture throughout Western Europe, but also offer definitions of the sublime in terms of *energy*, *elevation*, *highness*, *grandness*, and *excellence* as the concept had been taken over from Longinus.

6.3. A “Disposition” for the Sublime

About a year before Piranesi published *Parere* Plate VIII, in 1766 Kant had published his *Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and Sublime*. In this early, pre-critical work, the philosopher examined the two concepts under four thematic headings: ‘Of the Distinct Objects of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime’, ‘Of the Attributes of the Beautiful and Sublime in Man in General’, ‘Of the Distinction of the Beautiful and Sublime in the Interrelations of the Two Sexes’, and ‘Of National Characteristics, so far as They Depend upon the Distinct Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime’. Evidently, Kant conceived of the beautiful and sublime fundamentally as the psychological capacity in the viewer to perceive these qualities, just as at the beginning of the century, Rapin had discussed the term in the context of his study of human mores and dispositions and argued its stronger presence in certain cultures than in others. Indeed Kant admitted that beauty or sublimity were characteristics prompted by the

¹² William Wordsworth, “Letter to J. Fletcher,” *Letters of the Wordsworth Family*, vol. II, ed. W. Knight (1787-1849; 1907), p. 250.

¹³ René Rapin, “Du grand ou du sublime dans les moeurs et dans les différentes conditions des homes,” *Œuvres*, vol. III (Amsterdam: Pierre Mortier, 1701; 1709), p. 446.

object and its physical features.¹⁴ Yet beauty or sublimity might be but non-existent except for the viewer's "capacity" of feeling for it. Thus "the feeling of the sublime" and "the feeling of the beautiful" comprised a "capacity" inherent in some persons by which they were able to perceive the beauty or the sublimity in the object. Primary, therefore, was viewer capacity: "The various feelings," wrote Kant, "of enjoyment or of displeasure rest not so much upon the nature of the external things that arouse them as upon each person's own disposition to be moved by these to pleasure or pain" (*Observations*, 45).

In 1757, Burke in his *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* had similarly granted some objects the capacity to evoke the feeling of the sublime. Such an object was, according to Burke, "a source of the sublime; that is, it [is] productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (45-47). Though Burke had conceived of the capacity to apprehend the sublime as innate to the human mind, thus as something which all persons were capable of feeling when they encountered a certain kind of object, nevertheless the sublime, he maintained, did not actualize until a viewer perceived such an object and felt its sublimity (*Inquiry*, 35, 55). There are considerable differences between Burke's and Kant's views on the topic, attributable to differences between British empiricism and continental rationalism in the eighteenth century. But both of these philosophers' works were part of an eighteenth-century paradigm that attributed substantial formative power to the viewer's mental attributes, which resonated in Kant's notion of the "disposition to be moved." We may surmise that this attribution of the capacity to perceive the sublime derived from the now popular Longinus, who had claimed that, "Sublimity is the echo of a noble mind" (*On Sub.* 9. C. 2-3).¹⁵

Eighteenth-century architects as well as artists were in fact experimenting with the visual-technical implications of the psychological concept of "disposition." They had translated the concept into the spatial practice of perspective and *vista* as an essential way to generate particular views of beauty or sublimity.¹⁶ Eighteenth-century

¹⁴ For Kant's claims see Israel Knox, *The Aesthetic Theories of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 56.

¹⁵ Also see Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm*, p. 18; and see the sections in Chapter 2 above, on *Le style c'est l'homme même*.

¹⁶ Piranesi's persistent pursuit of study with prominent masters of the perspective technique pretty much demonstrates the point of this research into *vista*: see Chapter 3, pp. 27-41 above. See Murray, *Piranesi and the Grandeur of Ancient Rome*, p. 8; Penny, *Piranesi*, p. 5; Wilton-Ely, *Mind and*

landscape architecture, for example, is fertile ground for locating instances of implementation of the philosophical concept of *dis-position* as the concrete *positioning* of the viewer to lend *vista* and thus establish the circumstances for the perception of beauty or sublimity. The *exedra*—open-air sites for sitting in order to contemplate a view of built or natural environment—that are deployed throughout eighteenth-century gardens are a case in point. The bench, for example, set across the river ‘Styx’ in the Elysian Fields of the Stowe Gardens near London set the perspective upon Kent’s 1734 Temple of British Worthies which the thoughtful viewer was to pursue for the contemplation of national history (Fig. 6.3).¹⁷ Let us bring in, then, two pairs of further examples involving Piranesi for this assimilation of human “disposition” into spatial language in order to demonstrate how the eighteenth century put “dis-position” to work in the drawing of architecture with an eye to the distinction between beautiful and sublime.



Figure 6.8. William Kent, Temple of British Worthies and the River Styx, viewed in 2005 from bench set across the river: by the Temple of Ancient Virtue

Art, p. 10; Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, pp. 1-3, 9, 32n.6, 8, 20; Richard Wendorf, “Piranesi’s Double Ruin,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34:2 (2001): 163, 171-72.

¹⁷ For an interpretation of the Stowe Gardens, see Augustyn, “Subjectivity in the Fictional Ruin,” p. 441n.13.

Fig. 6.4 and 6.5 show the respective renditions of the *Ponte Salario* in Rome by Giuseppe Vasi and Piranesi. The primary difference between Piranesi's representation and Vasi's is achieved by shift of perspective and framing. A cursory comparison of the drawings in Fig. 6.4 and 6.5 indicates Vasi's picturesque quality while Piranesi is achieving a different effect, far from anything we might term 'picturesque'. Vasi fixed the vanishing point of the scenery at the height of a viewer looking at the scene from a spot this side of the river so as to position the viewer isocephalus with a human figure

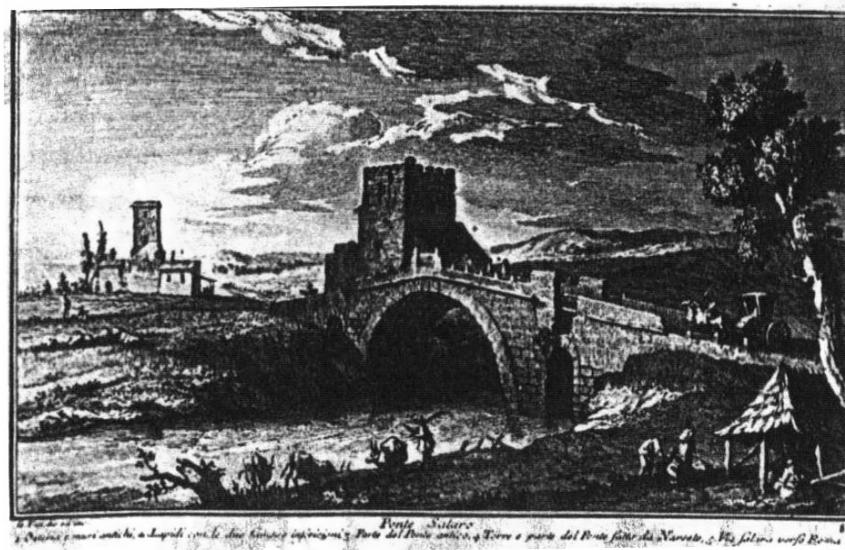


Figure 6.9. Giuseppe Vasi, *Ponte Salario*, *Magnificenze di Roma Antica e Moderna*, 1754



Figure 6.10. *Ponte Salario*, *Vedute*, 1754

standing near the horizon line.¹⁸ This viewer of average height is standing up on the slope at whose foot the humans in the foreground of the picture are located. Vasi's viewer, we may surmise, is standing flush with the ground of the bridge accessing the ancient tower. This characteristic lends human dimension to the picture. Similarly, the horizon line cuts across the point connecting the end of the bridge and the grounds of the tower, once again emphasizing the point of human access to the ancient architectural work. In fact, a horse cart is about to mount the bridge for the crossing, and it seems not at all an arduous crossing. Vasi's framing is panoramic, moreover, including humans and a built structure this side of the river—where we, the implied viewer of average height, stand in the vicinity of other humans in serene pastoral existence. The built structure in the forefront to the right recalls the illustration in Laugier's *Essai* (1753), of Vitruvius' "rustic hut" (Fig. 6.6) which the ancient Roman architect had described as



Figure 6.6. Marc-Atoine Laugier, Rustic Hut, detail, *Essai*, 1753

¹⁸ Samuel Y. Edgerton's definition of horizon line isocephaly runs as follows: "Horizon line isocephaly describes the phenomenon whereby, if we see other persons standing on the same plane as ourselves, the apparent diminution in the size of more distant figures begins with the feet; the heads of all figures standing on the same level as the viewer are always seen aligned with his own head on the common horizon." *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 26. Also see his pp. 42-49.

the first human dwelling (*De arch.* Book II: I C.), and which referred to the functional principles of nature that provided the base of architecture.¹⁹ In the illustration to Laugier (Fig. 5.1), the architectural Muse is pointing at the hut, the origin of architecture, as she leans on the ‘present’, the building details indicative of eighteenth-century architectural styles and stylistic components.

Fig. 6.7 indicates the isocephalus perspective construction of Vasi’s rendition that depicts a scene of human proportion, assimilating the historical artefacts into the *natural* order of the present. Vasi’s drawing belongs to the category of the ‘beautiful’. It is like Kent’s vista upon the Temple of British Worthies which too, Kant and Burke would claim, prompted the perception of the ‘beautiful’. “The sight of flower-strewn meadows, valleys with winding brooks and covered with grazing flocks” is beautiful, as in Vasi’s drawing, and “the description of Elysium” is beautiful as in Kent’s Temple, by Kant’s terms (*Observations*, 47). Burke’s description, “Beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly,” defines the softly rolling hills and shore line in Vasi: “beauty should be light and delicate” (*Inquiry*, 74).

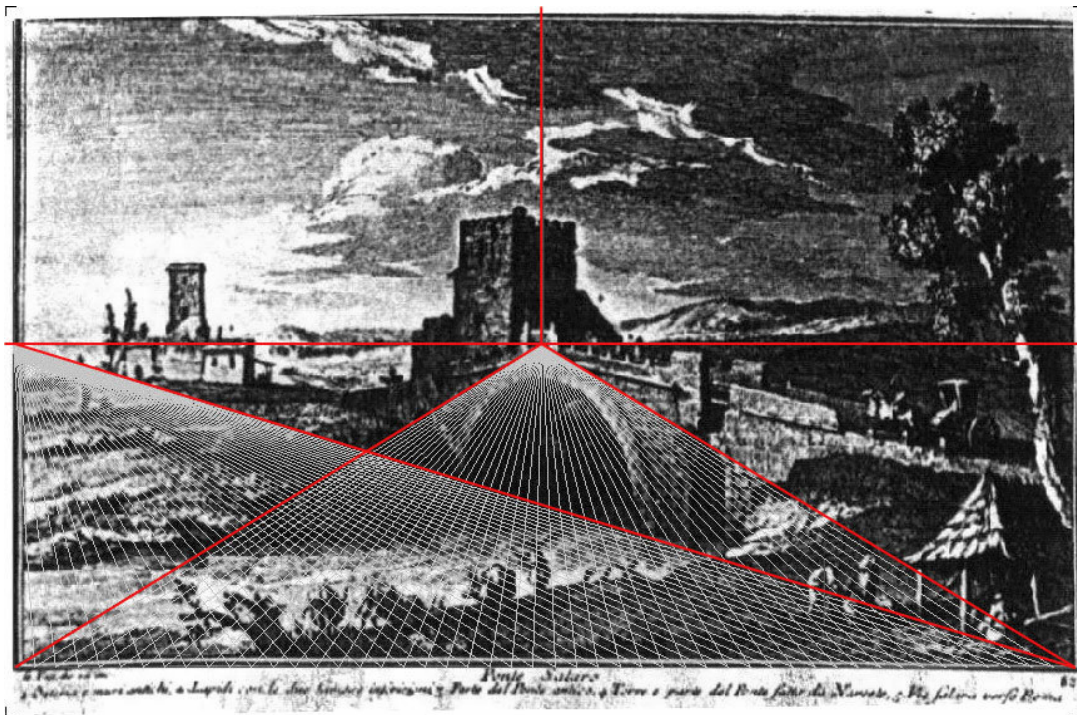


Figure 6.7. Perspective construction of Vasi’s *Ponte Salaria*

¹⁹ For more information about Laugier’s *Essai* see Rykwert, *On Adam’s House in Paradise*, pp. 46-47; Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, p. 36. See also Chapter 5, pp. 89-90 above.

Piranesi (Fig. 6.5), by contrast, raises the structure of the *Ponte* onto a plane above the one where the hypothetical viewer is standing. The bridge and the tower become imposing and elusive structures far above us. The placement of the vanishing point in Piranesi's drawing is conducive to the effect of heightening (Fig. 6.8): aside from the heightening of the pictured object he achieves by the particular placement of the perspective by which the implied viewer is standing much below the architectural object, Piranesi's framing too, focuses on the *Ponte* to the exclusion of nearly all else.

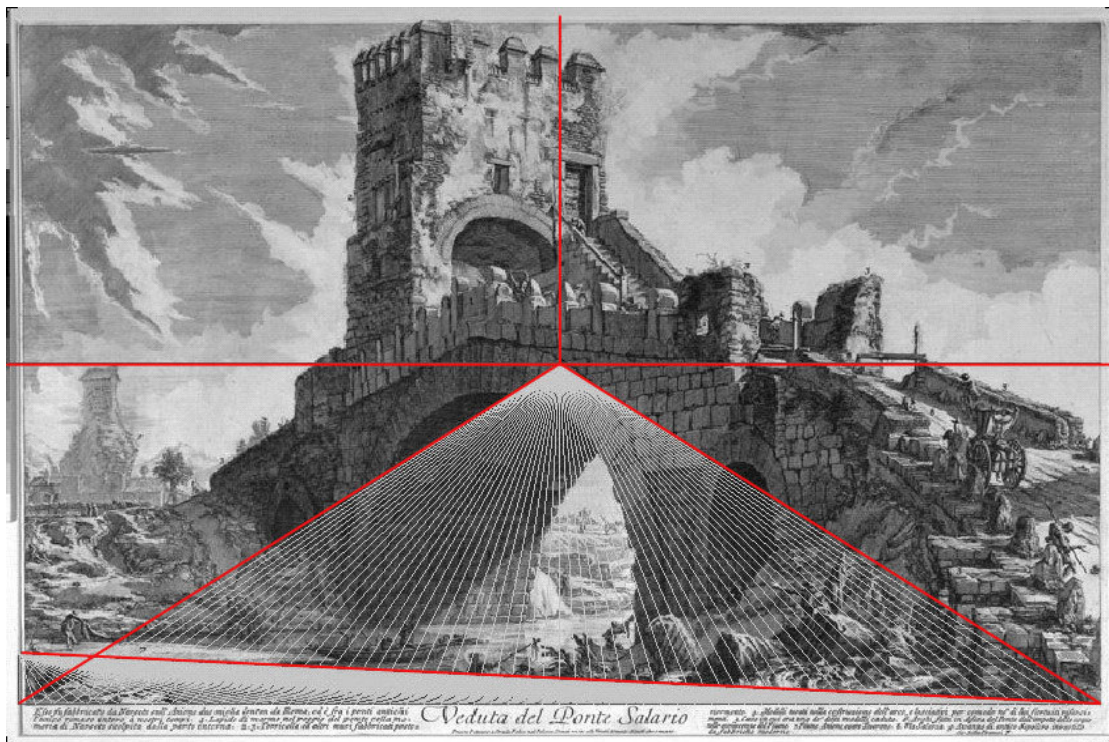


Figure 6.8. Perspective construction of Piranesi's *Ponte Salario*

In other words, Piranesi's rendition is not panoramic like Vasi's. The 'heightening' thus achieved by the double action of perspective-placement and narrowed cadre effects a surplus that is absent in Vasi's rendition. The narrowing further enables the articulating of shadow and light. At play in Vasi's rendition too, shadow and light there appeared as natural features embedded in the panoramic view juxtaposing nature and art (art: architecture in its different stylistic and historical varieties). In Piranesi, the play of light and shadow bear as it were unnatural, even supra-natural effect.²⁰ "Mere light is too

²⁰ For the conception of supra-natural, see Meyer Howard Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism, Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1973), pp. 65-70.

common a thing to make a strong impression on the mind,” wrote Burke, “and without a strong impression nothing can be sublime. [...] A quick transition from light to darkness, or from darkness to light, has yet a greater effect. But darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light” (*Inquiry*, 67-68). “Quick transition” between light and darkness is characteristic of Piranesi’s drawings as is observable in Fig. 2.4 and 3.2 and all his interior drawings. The alteration between dark and light is striking enough a feature of his *oeuvre* to have given rise to two poems by Hans Magnus Enzensberger.²¹ Again, Burke devotes particular attention to this feature of the sublime. The context of his discussion is clearly architectural:

all edifices calculated to produce an idea of the sublime, ought rather to be dark and gloomy, and this for two reasons; the first is, that darkness itself on other occasions is known by experience to have a greater effect on the passions than light. The second is, that to make an object very striking, we should make it as different as possible from the objects with which we have been immediately conversant; when therefore you enter a building, [...] to make the transition thoroughly striking, you ought to pass from the greatest light, to as much darkness as is consistent with the uses of architecture (*Inquiry*, 68-69).

Far from participating in the contented rustic labor Vasi’s human figures are engaged in, the human figures in Piranesi’s drawing are worn-out toilers (Fig. 6.9) much like the inmates of the dark prisons depicted in the *Carceri* series (Fig. 6.10)²² whom Christadler aptly described as ‘minute, faceless-masked.’²³ Distinguishing between beautiful and sublime in terms of human instincts, Burke identified self-preservation as the primary instinct; described its manifestation as “pain” felt in the face of “danger,” and termed its ultimate effect ‘sublime’ (*Inquiry*, 45). Piranesi’s human figures in the *Ponte*, like those in the *Carceri*, are toiling for mere self-preservation and are identifiable in Burkean terms as creating the effect of the sublime. Piranesi’s bridge is accessible perhaps by hard physical effort; its steepness is foreboding. The cart setting out up the bridge faces no easy ride. As in Vasi’s, there is too a hut on the lower right hand side, but this one poses no allusion to the eighteenth-century conception of the Vitruvian hut. It is low, dark, *grotto*-like: grotesque. Vasi’s picturesque countryside has turned infernal in Piranesi.

²¹ On Enzensberger’s Piranesi poems, see W. S. Sewell, “‘Dunkel hell dunkel’ Enzensberger’s Two Piranesi Poems,” *Festschrift for E.W. Herd*, ed. August Obermayer; T. E. Carter (Dunedin, N.Z.: Dept. of Ger., University of Otago, 1980), pp. 238-50.

²² For a discussion of the human figures in the *Carceri*, see Augustyn, “Subjectivity in the Fictional Ruin,” p. 450.

²³ Christadler, “Giovanni Battista Piranesi,” p. 79.



Figure 6.9 Human figures in Piranesi's *Ponte Salario*

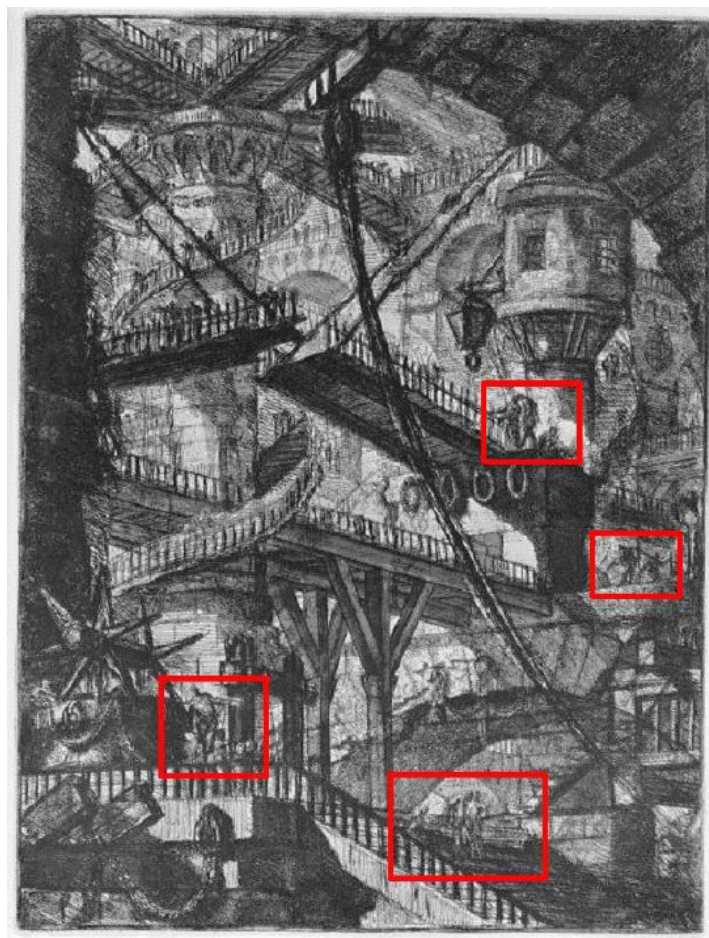


Figure 6.10. Human figures in Piranesi's Plate VII, *The Drawbridge, Carceri d'Invenzione*, 1760

The publication date of both Vasi's and Piranesi's drawings are 1754. As Piranesi studied with Vasi in the early 1740s,²⁴ he most likely knew the latter's drawing and re-worked it, transforming a 'beautiful' drawing into a 'sublime' one. According to Legrand, Vasi and Piranesi split paths upon the former's declaration that, 'You are too much of a painter, my friend, to be an engraver'.²⁵ In re-working Vasi's drawing, Piranesi may have been making a point directed at him by 'improving' on his former master's work. But Piranesi appears to have engaged rather systematically in such revision of others' drawings as our next example below will demonstrate.²⁶

In fact, the same observations may be made in a comparison of Duflos' rendition of the Basilica of Maxentius and Piranesi's drawing of the same (Fig. 6.11, 6.13). Unlike Vasi's of the *Ponte*, Duflos' does not invoke the picturesque, however. It rather constitutes a faithful rendition of classical structure in its symmetry and proportion, which characteristic too, was included in the definition of the beautiful. Duflos was continuing the classicism in architectural drawing that had been established in Alberti's fifteenth-century culture, as may be observed in Etienne Dupérac's (1525–1604) 1575 drawing of the basilica (Fig. 6.12) which had been published in his *I vestigi dell'antichità di Roma*.²⁷ In Duflos, the viewer is again, as in Vasi, on a par with the architectural object, with the distribution of shadow and light following a natural (or, rational) order (Fig. 6.11). In its emphasis on classical symmetry and proportion, Duflos' drawing concurs with not only Kant and Burke's descriptions of the beautiful, but also Vitruvius':

There is nothing to which an architect should devote more thought than to the exact proportions of his building with reference to a certain part selected as the standard. After the standard of symmetry has been determined, and the proportionate dimensions adjusted by calculations, it is next the part of wisdom to consider the nature of the site, or questions of use or beauty, and modify the plan by diminutions or additions in such a manner that these diminutions or additions in the symmetrical relations may be seen to be made on correct principles, and without detracting at all from the effect (*De arch.*, Book VI: II C. 1).

²⁴ On Piranesi's work in Vasi's studio, see Ficacci's introduction "The Discovery of Rome out of the Spirit of Piranesi," to *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, pp. 14-15, and above, Chapter 3, p. 29.

²⁵ See Legrand in *Notice historique* which was also published in *Nouvelles de l'estampe*, No. 5, 1969, p. 194. Also see Wilton-Ely, *Mind and Art*, p. 12.

²⁶ Oechslin too, takes up this phenomenon in Piranesi and discusses it in terms of the function of drawing in Piranesi as "explanation": "Piranesi to Libeskind: Explaining by Drawing."

²⁷ Rome, 1575; 1606.

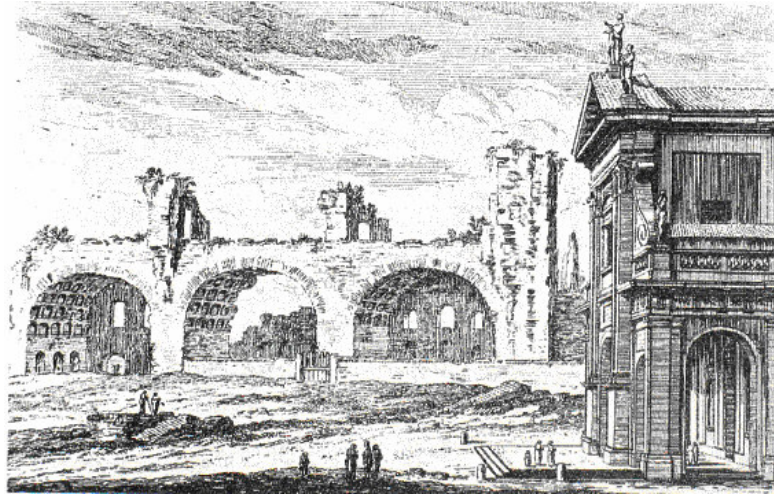


Figure 6.11. François Philotée Duflos, Basilica of Maxentius, *Varie Vedute*, 1748

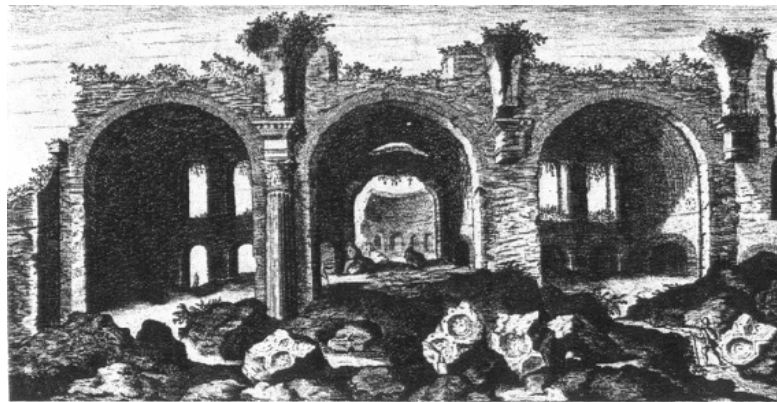


Figure 6.12. Etienne Dupérac, Basilica of Maxentius, *I Vestigi dell'Antichità di Roma*, 1575

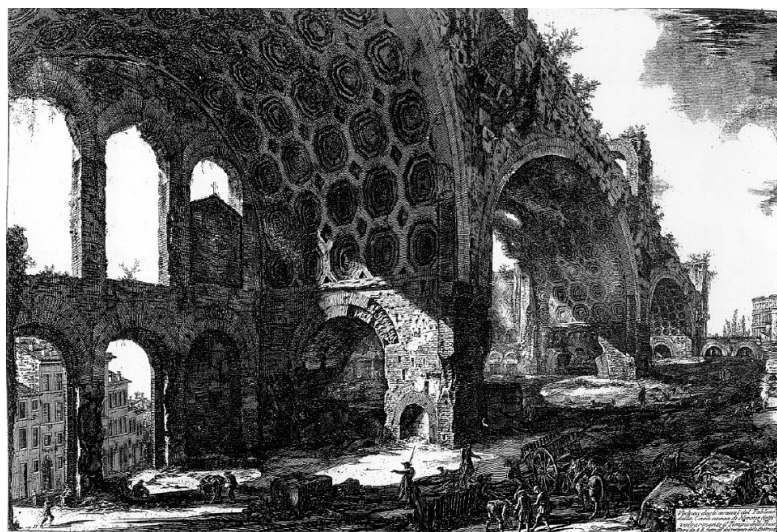


Figure 6.13. Basilica of Maxentius, *Antichità*, 1756

In the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant identified first “two kinds of beauty: free beauty (*pulchritude vaga*) [and] dependent beauty (*pulchritude adhaerens*).” Proportion emerged as the physical feature of dependent beauty:

[...] human beauty (i.e. of a man, a woman, or a child), the beauty of a horse, or a building (be it church, palace, arsenal, or summerhouse) presupposes a concept of the purpose which determines what the thing is to be, and consequently a concept of its perfection; it is therefore adherent beauty.²⁸

In proportion, claimed Burke, “there is nothing to interest the imagination” (75). In fact, like its sixteenth-century ancestor (Fig. 6.12) Duflos’ rendition is a mere documentary of classical norm, as the more recent building to the right is demonstrated, in this drawing, to comply with that norm.

Piranesi’s drawing of the *Maxentius* bears features of sublimity comparable to those of his *Ponte*, where the viewer had been placed at such low level vis-à-vis the horizon line that the architectural structures seemed imposing in their dimensions. The same technic is used in the *Maxentius* (Fig. 6.14 and 6.15). The absence of isocephaly in

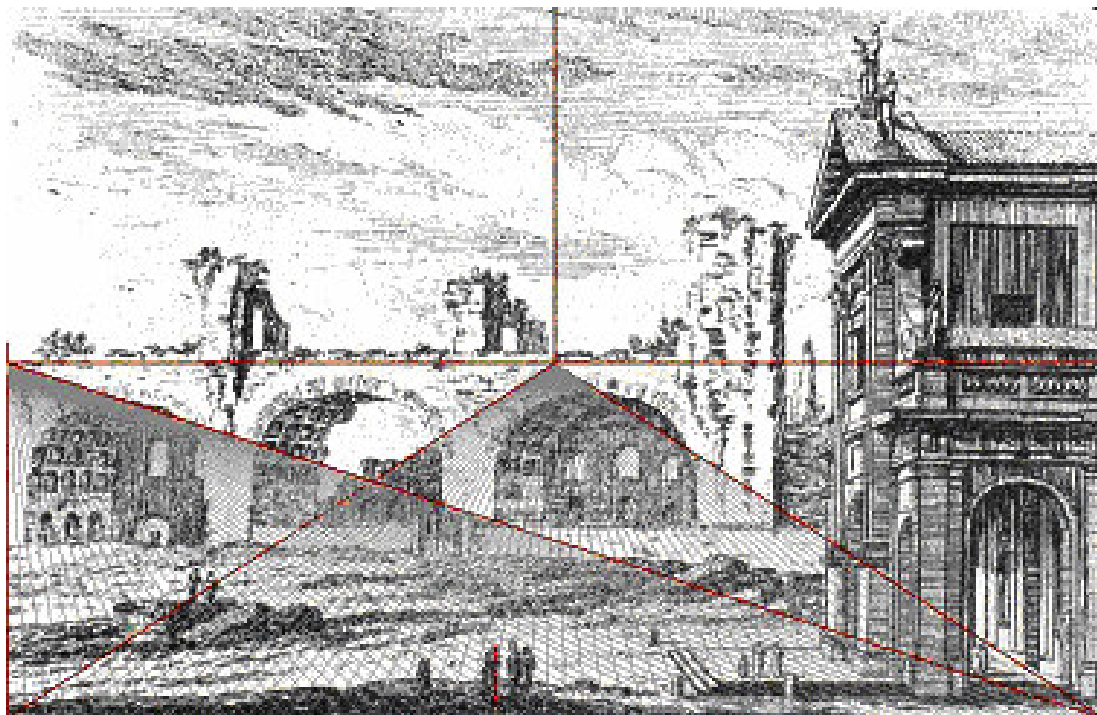


Figure 6.14. Perspective construction of Duflos’ Basilica of Maxentius

²⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1790; 1978), pp. 81-82.

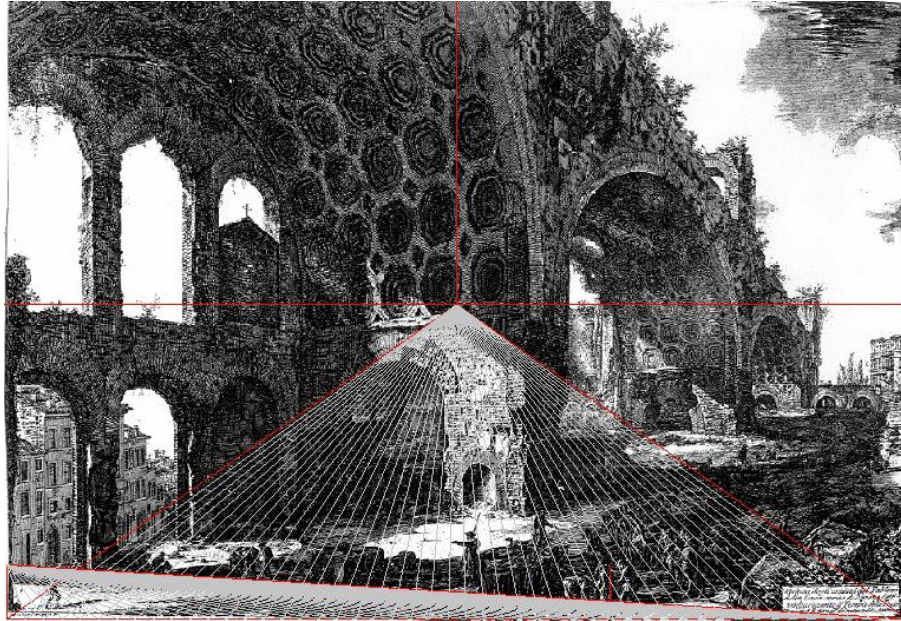


Figure 6.15. Perspective construction of Piranesi's Basilica of Maxentius

Piranesi's perspective constructs renders the architectural object larger than human scale would warrant. This placement of the viewer equally serves to establish a depth or infinity effect to the picture and underscores its three-dimensionality. Both Kant and Burke list the effect of infinity among those that stimulate the feeling of the sublime (*Observations*, 48-50, *Inquiry*, 62). As in most other drawings by Piranesi, here again we see the *chiaroscuro* effect created especially by the positioning of light and shadow on the cassettes on the inner surface of the arches of the *Maxentius*. But Piranesian *chiaroscuro* generates more shadows than light, which creates darker spaces and a strong feeling of the sublime.

Thus eighteenth-century architects experimented with perspective. The stance from which one elected to view an object bore, of course, technical results and artistic effects. The eighteenth century read these results and effects in psychological terms expressing the artist's "disposition." The architectural drawing of extant buildings, particularly the ruins of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, were the prominent framework for the deployment of this particular conception of "disposition" which spelled the complete coalescence of technic and architect's or artist's character, and their distribution as beautiful or sublime. Thus too, we obtain a historically more truthful clue as to how, in fact, Leclerc's "The style is the man himself" was put to practice in its own time: this was style *not* as a transparent indicator of its creator's psychological make-up

as found in Abrams and other twentieth-century critics; but as a situated *eye*, a capacity to see in the architectural or other object, a dimension beyond (classical) beauty. Given Piranesi's vocation, the situation of this eye was defined as a historical situation. The etching *Avanzo del Tempio della Concordia* from the *Antichità* (1756, Fig. 6.16) may be taken as a variant of his Basilica of Maxentius and as yet another commentary on Duflos' rendition of the Basilica. Piranesi's *Concordia* participates perhaps not too much in the sublime, except for the coalescence of building with sky at the far end of the temple, the slightness of the human figures, and the swift alterations of dark and light.²⁹ It demonstrates, however, the grounding of the *difference* of his *vista* so as to render each drawing a 'comprehensive system of historical allusion'.³⁰



Figure 6.16. *Avanzo del Tempio della Concordia*, *Antichità*, I, 1756

²⁹ For a detailed description and discussion of the drawing, see Andrew Robison, "Preliminary Drawings for Piranesi's Early Architectural Fantasies," *Master Drawings* 15: 4 (1977): 387-401. Robison relates Piranesi's *Concordia* to his series *Grotteschi* of 1744-1745. Being sepulchral, the *Concordia* is relevant to the sublime.

³⁰ Maurizio Calvesi, "Nota ai 'grotteschi' o capricci di Piranesi," *Piranesi e la cultura antiquaria, gli antecedenti e il contesto: Atti del convegno, 14-17 Novembre 1979*, ed. Anna Lo Bianco (Rome: Multigrafica, 1983), p. 135.

6.4. Sublime characteristics

Descriptions of the sublime by Kant and Burke almost read as ecphrastic prose glossing Piranesi's drawings.³¹ In Kant the sublime is, "Formless, boundless, chaotic in nature of might and magnitude." It is "the violation of form in nature" and must "always be great" (*Observations*, 47-48).³² Fig. 6.17 and 6.18 from the two *Carceri* series of 1745 and 1760 are among those illustrating Kantian 'formlessness', 'boundlessness' that indicate the breakdown of classical form. The quality of 'chaos' present in these two plates, at first glance implies the antithesis of classicism. The architectonic in the plate in Fig. 6.18 would however, upon prolonged viewing, show a very co-ordinated classical structure. But Piranesi's particular—low—placement of the sight point, the play of shadow and light render dominant not classical form but the human and



Figure 6.17. Title page, *Invenzioni capricci di carceri*, 1745



Figure 6.18. Plate II, *Carceri d'Invenzione*, 1760

³¹ For a definition of ecphrasis, see Jean Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 1987), p. 18n.34. For a discussion of ecphrasis in eighteenth-century drawings see Augustyn, "Subjectivity in the Fictional Ruin," pp. 443-44. A discussion of the relationship between ecphrastic drawing and Oechslin's conception of "drawing as explanation" could make up a chapter in itself.

³² Also see Knox, *The Aesthetic Theories of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer*, pp. 54-58.

historical debris in the forefront. Stafford maintains that such “obscurely jumbled” architectural phenomena await “Piranesi’s subsequent encyclopedic” ordering to demonstrate the meaning they have “accrued over time.”³³

The feeling of the sublime “is sometimes accompanied with a certain dread, or melancholy,” writes Kant, “in some cases merely with quiet wonder [.]” Therefore “a great height is just as sublime as a great depth, except the latter is accompanied with the sensation of shuddering, the former with one of wonder” (*Observations*, 47-49). The reader may be referred to Fig. 2.4 for the sense of “dread” and “shuddering” at the sight of “great depth,” which, as we saw, De Quincey too had glimpsed.³⁴ At first glance Fig. 6.19 casts a view of classical order. The placement of the sight point, the notion of a vantage point towering above even monumental towers, however, robs the orderly of any sense of classical beauty and yields “wonder” at the least.

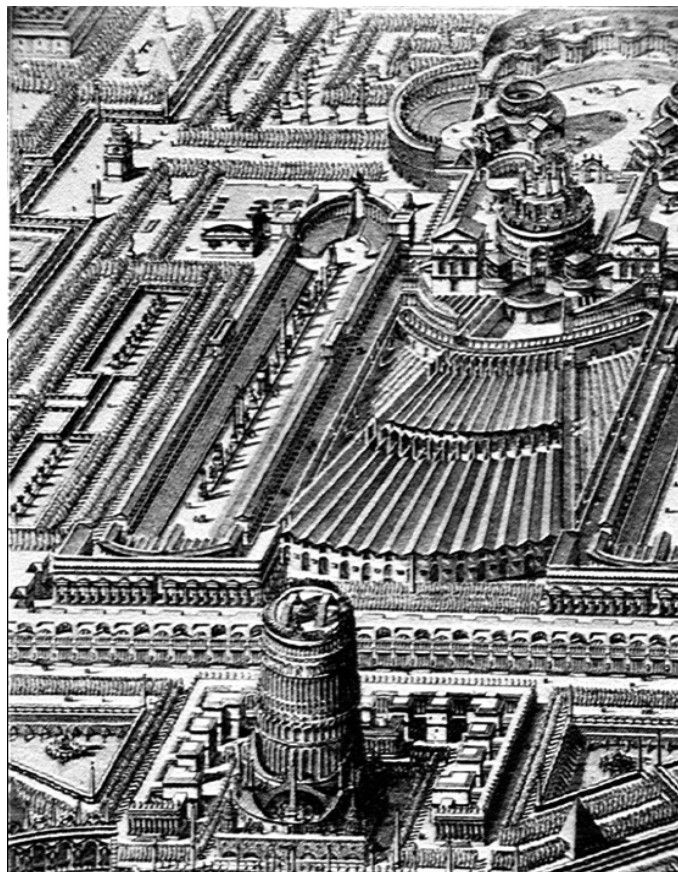


Figure 6.19. Frontispiece II, oblique perspective from *Ichnographia*, detail, *Campo*, 1762

³³ Stafford, “Bare versus Prismatic Style,” p. 353.

³⁴ See Chapter 2, pp. 15-17.

Kant continues by giving natural examples of the sublime like “the sight of a mountain whose snow-covered peak rises above clouds, the description of a raging storm, or Milton’s portrayal of the infernal kingdom [in his *Paradise Lost*], arouse enjoyment but with horror” (*Observations*, 47). It is this ‘horror’ that comprises the effect of the sublime. Burke describes the sublime as follows:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling (*Inquiry*, 45-47).

Burke goes on to describe the sublime by its concrete physical appearance: “sublime objects are vast in their dimensions [...]; the great, rugged and negligent [...]; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates it often makes a strong deviation [...]; the great ought to be dark and gloomy [...]; the great ought to be solid, and even massive” (*Inquiry*, 101-102). Piranesi’s drawings of the *Ponte* and *Maxentius’ Basilica* clearly fall in the category of Burkean and Kantian sublime, as does the structure depicted in Fig. 3.31. Like Kant’s mountain whose peak is invisible, the human eye is dreadfully unable to glimpse the zenith or closure to this structure. We find in it the Burkean “right line” but—again as in Burke—with ‘strong deviations’ that shun the right angle and result in an added sense of steepness, height, and inaccessibility. The effect of “terror” is the direct source of the sublime and yields a version of aesthetic pleasure in Burke: “[...] terror is a passion which always produces delight” (*Inquiry*, 41). Like Kant, Burke identifies Milton, particularly his description of *Death in Paradise Lost*, as a prime example of the sublime. Burke could be describing a plate, such as that in Fig. 2.4, from Piranesi’s *Carceri*: “In his [Milton’s] description all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree” (*Inquiry*, 51). Burke also commented on Milton’s description of Satan: “the mind is hurried out of itself, by a crowd of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused.” “[I]n nature, dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions.” While the entire *Carceri* series are replete with the sense of “terror” and “obscurity,” Fig. 6.17 and 6.18 particularly illustrate Burke’s description. The Burkean “vastness” and “magnificence” and the Kantian “eternity” and “profundity,” on the other hand, are felt, again, especially in *Campo* (Fig. 6.19) and

Antichità (Fig. 3.31) while “light” effects and “sudden” alterations between light and darkness, white and black are seen in all Piranesi drawings.

As evinced already in such titles as “Magnitude in Building” and “Light in Building,” Burke’s examples of the sublime, even entire chapters of his discussion thereof, directly derive from architecture (*Inquiry*, 49-73). In “Magnitude in Building” of 1757 (*Inquiry*, 61), Burke wrote as if he were contemplating Piranesi’s Plate VII (Fig. 2.4) from *Invenzioni capricci di carceri* (1745): “Greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime.” By playing on scale, Piranesi magnified architectural elements, which becomes more striking in comparison with classical human scale. “Extension is either in length, height, or depth. Of these the length strikes least.” Again, the effect of extension in both height and depth is observable in *Carceri*, where in order to obtain the effect of verticality, spaces have been extended upward and downward, even beyond the margins of the plate: “the perpendicular has more force in forming the sublime, than an inclined plane.” Although the figure of the drawbridge seems, at first glance, an inclined element, by lifting it up, Piranesi was able to break its inclined appearance. “[H]eight is less grand than depth,” wrote Burke, which is again found in Plate VII: by *chiaroscuro*, Piranesi etched the structures at the background lightly and the figures at the foreground in bold in order to create the effect of depth, and rendered depth dominant by emphasizing the *chiaroscuro*. Finally, Burke writes that, “the effects of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger,” which may be discerned in especially the stones of the arches in Plate VII. Apart from the fact of these stones stimulating sublimity by their unrefined appearance, they also reflect the remoteness of past time and thus reflect yet another sublime character: we read in Kant that the remoter the ancient object is in time, the more ruined the ruins of past time, the greater the degree of sublimity (*Observations*, 49, 50).

6.5. Beautiful Greece and Modern Sublime

Laugier had included the illustration of the Vitruvian hut (Fig. 5.1 and 6.6) in a part of his *Essai* that discussed the origins of architecture. This hut, he claimed, had derived from nature, in a culture and at a time in history that was close to nature. We have seen that like Winckelmann, Laugier argued that the origins of not only modern architecture but also Roman architecture whence the modern derived, stemmed from

Greek architecture.³⁵ Setting the standard for classical norm, Greek architecture was by definition beautiful, as it comprised the unmediated mimetic duplication of natural order.³⁶ Similarly Winckelmann identified Greece as providing the root of Roman and later classical art and architecture. The remainders at Paestum in Naples, he claimed, were clearly Greek, as they bore ‘noble aura’.³⁷ In his *Gedanken* published in 1755, he described Greek architecture by its character of “edle Einfalt und stille Grösse” (24) (noble simplicity and serene greatness), and maintained that Rome, in copying Greece, had degraded the qualities of ‘beauty’ of the original. This claim on behalf of Greek origins, in Winckelmann as in Laugier, served to assign secondary status to Roman architecture and its modern versions as well as explain their difference: the Greeks had copied nature, and they had done so well. The Romans had copied the Greeks, thus were removed from the original source—nature—and they had not copied well. ‘Beauty’ belonged with Greece.

The defense of Roman architecture thus had to attach itself to a concept and a character other than ‘beauty’. Its character, as is familiar to us from myriad architectural writings of the past, was regarded as public and as having grandeur: Roman architecture was monumental. Rome clearly came rather late in history—than Greece, for example. Its architecture’s difference from Greece demanded explanation, which, in eighteenth-century terms essentially meant identifying a historically precedent culture from which it derived.³⁸ In the case of Rome, moreover, there was the underlying stratum of Etruscan architecture and artefacts of which the eighteenth century, as progenitor of the discipline of archaeology, was aware. Thus a Piranesi argued that Roman architecture derived from the Etruscan, which in turn derived from the Egyptian: “The Roman and Tuscan were at first one and the same, the Romans learned architecture from the Tuscans, and made use of no other for many ages,” wrote Piranesi in his preface entitled “Apologetical Essay” (15). Piranesi was by no means alone in this view. Le Roy defended that the Greeks themselves had copied their monumental architecture from Egypt (*Ruines*, 13) and the Fransiscan Lodoli, as we saw, went even further and claimed

³⁵ See Chapter 5, pp. 89-90.

³⁶ See Laugier, *Essai*, p. 2.

³⁷ Winckelmann, *Gedanken*, p. 138.

³⁸ See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. F. Kölln and J.P. Pettegrove (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1951; 1979).

that the Doric order ought to be re-named after its Egyptian origins and called the ‘Egyptian order’ and that the Tuscan—by which Lodoli meant Etruscan—order had too been invented by Egyptians.³⁹

The debate on origins of European architecture thus coalesced with the contemporaneous philosophical debate on the relationship/difference between the beautiful and the sublime. Monumental Egyptian architecture was sublime in its supra-human scale, its impenetrability, and in the fact that in ancientness it surpassed anything known of Antiquity. Piranesi was going to represent his notion of historical derivation in a drawing of 1750 (Fig. 5.12), in which the grandeur of Romanesque architecture was shown to *lean on* the even grander Egyptian pyramid. The two structures were depicted as inseparable; the Romanesque as offspring of the Egyptian and a mere fragment but for the support provided by the older building. The words from Le Roy we saw Piranesi etched in Plate VIII of the *Parere* had identified monumental architecture as the sublime art and copying—that very craft in which Winckelmann claimed Romans had failed—he had reduced to ‘craft’. There was indeed room for this craft in eighteenth-century culture as Kantian and Burkean theorizing on the ‘beautiful’ and as so much classicist architecture of the period evinces. And Piranesi seems to have acknowledged it in so far as his copying, say, of Vasi’s *Ponte Salario* demonstrates that. His aim, however, was the sublime as this provided, via an Egyptian detour circumventing Greece, freedom from imitation of classicist norm toward inventing the modern. This invention took on the form of the *capriccio*, which has also been described as ‘the poetics of the ruin’.⁴⁰

³⁹ Lodoli’s opinion has been handed down by Andrea Memmo in his *Elementi*, pp. 296-97n.48.

⁴⁰ Augustyn, “Subjectivity in the Fictional Ruin,” p. 433.

CHAPTER 7

EPILOGUE

This thesis has argued that Giovanni Battista Piranesi was a significant figure in the history of architecture who was one of the major forces behind the rise of modern scientific archaeology and history of architecture in the course of the eighteenth century. Since this argument contrasts sharply with the dominant perception of Piranesi as an eclectic, eccentric, unclassifiable architect who, though very productive, failed as an architect, the thesis had to first interpret existing misinterpretations of Piranesi's work. This was conducted by a discussion of the sources of the negative perception of Piranesi, particularly generated by Romantic poets, novelists, and theorists. Piranesi's work had been interpreted mostly through his life and psychological character. Oddly, though, there were no modern biographies of Piranesi. With the additional factor of the lack of systematic catalogues and chronologies of his work, it became necessary to delineate an *architectural* biography of the architect in order to arrive at a positive interpretation of his work.

The chronology of Piranesi's work demonstrates a career that begins by mastering existent forms and techniques of architectural drawing, which he then was going to refine toward a manner of drawing that was able to represent buildings at once architecturally, archaeologically, and historically. Piranesi's biography also demonstrated that he participated in excavations as the ancient structures at Herculaneum, Pompeii, Tivoli, and Corneto were being discovered either for the first time or very early on in the process of their uncovering.

The other vector of misinterpretations of Piranesi comprises issues rooted in Fletcher's 1896 "Tree of Architecture." Piranesi's claim that Roman architecture derived not from the Greek but from the Etruscan, which derived from Egypt, caused him to be excluded from the standardized progress of architectural history in the west and to be interpreted as an aberration. In other words, Piranesi's thesis is not comprehended even today by except for a few. Piranesi's thesis involved the argument that the architecture and many cultural features of ancient Greece and Rome were not 'original', but 'derivative' from older cultures. When Piranesi posited this argument, historical context was not prepared to accept such a privileging of the 'East': in the

course of the eighteenth century, Egypt, along with the rest of the realm of the Ottomans, was being identified with the ‘East’ and the non-European. The view that was gaining ground was Winckelmann’s position that began European architectural history with Greece. The architecture-historical argument of Piranesi and his milieu was excluded from the mainstream in a political context in which alliances were being formed to seize and colonize ‘eastern’ Egypt.¹ Piranesi’s thesis about architectural history ‘fell on deaf ears’. Eventually, however, though he was speaking against the rising mainstream, Piranesi was going to be interpreted as Orientalist by contemporary scholars following Edward Said. At the same time, as Winckelmann’s approach rooting the origin of Roman architecture in the Greek came to dominate the standard western view, the exclusion of Piranesi found more justification.

In his classic article of 1965, “Utopia, the city and the Machine,” Lewis Mumford asked: “why did so many of the characteristic institutions of utopia first come to light in the ancient city?”² Contrary to contemporary critics, who attribute to Piranesi a utopianism defined as lofty idealism and fantasy, Mumford conceived of the utopian nature of the city as a mechanism that increasingly aimed at “universal conscription [of] powers” that would come under the command of political rule.³ Piranesi seems to have grasped this nature of at least the city of Rome. What seems to have driven him to ‘dig deeper’ into Rome, to exhaust its *vedute*, and attain the complete map, was to grasp that magnificent machine of power as a whole. Rome was object of study for this architect who signed himself *architetto veneziano*. Rome seemed to hold the key to the mechanical order that was being created in eighteenth-century Europe, “based on quantitative measurements, indifferent to human qualities or purposes.”⁴ Inquiring scientist, one can understand the attraction of the new ideology of science for Piranesi, and would even claim that he was entirely part and member of it, were it not for the ironic distance displayed in his every plate.

¹ For the details of this historical and political development, see Enver Ziya Kaval, *Osmanlı Tarihi. V. Cilt: Nizam-ı Cedid ve Tanzimat Devirleri (1789-1856)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1947; 1988), pp. 21-43.

² Lewis Mumford, “Utopia, The City and The Machine,” *Daedalus* 94 (1965): 271.

³ Mumford, “Utopia, The City and The Machine,” p. 289.

⁴ Mumford, “Utopia, The City and The Machine,” p. 289.

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