Let us examine the hydraulic functioning of this amazing spiral amphitheater.\textsuperscript{152} The water level inside it is higher than the level of the Tiber. To fill it, Piranesi invents a spring called the Aqua Appia.\textsuperscript{153} Water flows out in spiral courses to a canal, or euripus, which is kept higher than the Tiber by a lock. To enter from the Tiber, ships could, it seems, pass through the lock and sail under the spirally arranged seats until they arrived at the arena. In the eighteenth century, there were no locks on the unregulated Tiber. Here we see the hand of Piranesi the Venetian, who grew up with water regulation and was inspired by Canaletto, probably by his beautiful etching of the Lock at Dolo (Fig. 23).

5. The Text of the Campus Martius

The Campus Martius is not only a beautiful book, it is also an erudite bilingual publication. The Italian text runs to thirty-one large folio pages of dense prose, full of learned Latin quotations as well as passages from Strabo in the original Greek; a Latin translation was meant to give the book international circulation. The text draws extensively on dozens of ancient authors, including Pliny, Varro, Livy, Cicero, Suetonius, Martial, Tacitus, Virgil, Ovid, Vitruvius, Frontinus, “Publius Victor”, and the Scriptores historiae augustae. A catalogue lists 312 monuments along with the authors who mention them, like an early version of a topographical dictionary in the manner of Platner and Ashby. Among modern antiquarians we find Flavio Biondo, Fulvio, Nardini, Donati, Bianchini, and the Jesuits Kircher, Hardouin, and Boscovich. The text represents a quantum leap in erudition over Piranesi’s earlier writings, worthy of an honorary fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, to which Piranesi was elected in April 1757 in recognition of the importance of the Antichità romane. The Campus Martius was the first in a spate of learned books that Piranesi wrote between 1761

\textsuperscript{152} Perhaps Piranesi recalled that the naumachia of Julius Caesar was built \textit{in morem cockleae} (A.M. Liberati, “Naumachia Caesaris”, in Lexicon Topographicum, III, p. 338).

\textsuperscript{153} Richardson, \textit{New Topographical Dictionary}, pp. 15f., for the textual sources from Frontinus and others regarding the Aqua Appia, which was not itself a spring but the oldest Roman aqueduct (312 B.C.), conveying water from a source near the Via Prenestina. An Aqua Appia near the Tiber has no basis in the sources.
and 1764 in the hope of establishing his credentials as an antiquarian and of succeeding eventually to the post of superintendent of antiquities, then occupied by Ridolfino Venuti (1705-1763).

Who wrote the text of the Campus Martius — Piranesi, or a clatch of "backroom abbés" in his service, compiling texts that give the book a patina of learning? Piranesi’s contemporaries and modern scholars are divided on the question.

Bianconi, in his biography of 1799, admits the presence of a live-in helper, "L’abbé Piermei", whom Augusta Monferinini has identified as the abate Piremei, an érudit whom we later find in the circle of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, and thus in an intellectual ambience, that of the Hellenic revival, far removed from Piranesi. However, a much stronger accusation appears in the hostile "Elogio" written by Bianconi in 1779, the year after Piranesi’s death:

Piranesi recruited distinguished scholars whom he charmed by his genius and his skill as an etcher. They did not hesitate to work for him by composing important treatises to go with his fine prints, and went so far as to allow him to publish them under his name. I do not hesitate to include Mons. Bottari and the learned Jesuit Contucci Contucci here, as well as others who need not be listed. Rome then witnessed the publication, one after another, of huge folio volumes of prints and learned dissertations under the name of someone who was hardly able to read them, though in his own way he could render good account of the contents when talking about them. Over the long run, however, he broke with almost all these érudits because of his natural intolerance and crudity, and in the end because these experts might not have wanted to adopt his extravagant visions. Piranesi wound up convincing himself that the books composed by such illustrious authors were entirely his own, and woe to anyone who dared contradict him, even when it was one of these very authors.

[Cattivasi egli destramente varj insigni letterati, i quali innamorati del suo ingegno e del suo bulino non isdegnarono di lavorare per lui, componendo insigni trattati corrispondenti a si bei rami, ed ebbeno la generosità di permettergli sino che li pubblicasse col suo nome. Non si dubiti di mettere in tale numero Monsig. Bottari, il dotto Padre Contucci Contucci Gesuita, e varj altri, che crediamo inutile di qui nominare. Vede dunque Roma uscire di tempo in tempo volumi atlantici di stampe e di dissertazioni dottissime col nome di chi appena era in stato di leggerle, benché potesse poi renderne buon conto, ma alla sua maniera, a chi gliene parlassa. Con quasi tutti questi letterati disgustavasi però alla lunga il Piranesi per la sua naturale intolleranza e rozzezza, ed ora perché non volevano que' dotti Scrittori adottare le]
sue stravaganti visioni. Arrivò finalmente il Piranesi a persuadersi, che erano opera intieramente sua quei libri, che per lui avevano composti penne tanto illustri, e guai se alcuno non gli le avesse accordato, non eccettuando qui neppure gli autori medesimi].

Among modern scholars, Musso and Scott tend to believe in the presence of ghostwriters, while Monferini and most others do not; indeed, Kantor-Kazovsky has recently put forth the case for an extremely literate artist. Surprisingly, however, Mario Bevilacqua, in a carefully considered review of the evidence, returns to something close to Bianconi's view. He sees group effort as the normal way of producing an erudite text in the period. Noli had assembled some of the same team to help with his map and the accompanying libro. Piranesi knew little Latin and no Greek, he feels, and wrote as roughly as the jottings in his notebooks, such as the sketchbooks now in Modena. He did, however, have clear and independent ideas, curiosity, and an eclectic cultural baggage anchored to a profound knowledge of Roman art and architecture. Bevilacqua's conclusion is that the texts were written by others, but they are the outcome of the artist's personal enthusiasms.

Bevilacqua's is a cogent analysis, and one cannot make a printmaker who produced on the average two prints a month into a full-

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154 Giovanni Lodovico Bianconi, "Elogio storico del cavaliere Giambattista Piranesi", Antologia romana 34, February 1779, pp. 265-84. This was reprinted in idem, Opere, 2, Lettere al marchese Filippo Herculano, Milan, 1802, pp. 125-40; there is a facsimile of the 1779 edition in Carlo Bertelli, "L'Elogio' di Bianconi", Grafica grafica II, no. 2, 1976, pp. 124-35. The quotation is from p. 274 of the 1779 edition, p. 130 in the 1976 publication.

155 In favor of ghostwriters are Luisa Musso, "Il Campo Marzio", in Piranesi nei luoghi di Piranesi, exh. cat., Rome, 1979, pp. 17-41; Scott, Piranesi, p. 167; and Susanna Pasquali, "Piranesi Architect, Courtier, and Antiquarian: The Late Rezzonico Years (1762-1768)", in The Serpent and the Stylus, pp. 171-94. Believers in Piranesi's literacy, on the other hand, include Augusta Monferini, "Piranesi e l'ambiente di Ridolfino Venuti", in Piranesi tra Venezia e l'Europa, pp. 35-44; Wilton-Ely, Mind and Art, pp. 65-80, and Introduction to Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette, Los Angeles, 2002, pp. 1-83. Kantor-Kazovsky assumes a highly literate artist in "Pierre Jean Mariette and Piranesi: The Controversy Reconsidered", in The Serpent and the Stylus, pp. 149-68, and in Piranesi, passim, making an especially strong defense of "his profound competence in the relevant sources (and) a breadth of knowledge that seemed unbelievable for an artist" (p. 79).

156 Bevilacqua, Piranesi: Taccuini di Modena, pp. 56-64.
time literary scholar. However, I would like to review the evidence for Piranesi's literacy and make a case for a more positive involvement with texts. Piranesi's immersion in Roman authors began when he was a boy and his older brother, a learned Carthusian, drilled Livy and other historians into him. He attempted to repeat this force-feeding on his own son, Francesco, born in 1758.157 During his first visit to Rome, at age twenty, when he was living with the Venetian ambassador at Palazzo Venezia, Piranesi's passion for the "speaking ruins" was so great that, according to a famous passage in Legrand, he would dash from the ruins to the libraries to understand the names of the remains and their functions, and then from the libraries back to the ruins, repeating the cycle until he collapsed from exhaustion. As we have seen, in these early years in Rome, he was allowed access to the capacious library of Nicola Giobbe and dedicated the _Prima parte di architetture_ to him in 1743.

Many scholars have commented on Piranesi's relationship with the erudite librarian of Cardinal Neri Corsini, Giovanni Gaetano Bottari (1689-1775). In 1748, Piranesi dedicated _Le Antichità romane de' tempi della Republica e de' primi Imperatori_ to him. Bottari, to Piranesi "a great connoisseur of these studies", not only facilitated Piranesi's access to books but also was a major influence on his thinking. To remedy the depredations of antiquities that Bottari lamented, Piranesi hoped to preserve them in prints, becoming, as Augusta Monferini says, a collaborator in the vast Bottarian design of documenting and valorizing Rome's ancient patrimony.158 In 1757,

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157 Gilbert Erouart and Monique Mosser, "A propos de la 'Notice historique sur la vie et les ouvrages de J.-B. Piranesi': Origine et fortune d'une biographie", in Georges Brunel, ed., _Piranès e les Français_, p. 236. Legrand calls the brother Ange, but Anzolo is the name of Piranesi's father, while his only brother, who was indeed a Carthusian, was named Luigi, as noted in Puppi, "Educazione veneziana", p. 219. A passage from a notebook, _Taccuino A_ in Modena, may show Piranesi's "curriculum" for Francesco; see Adriano Cavicchi and Silla Zamboni, "Due 'taccuini' inediti di Piranesi", in _Piranesi tra Venezia e l'Europa_, p. 188.

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Bottari published a letter written two centuries earlier by the Sienese antiquarian Claudio Tolomei, which outlined a program of research on antiquity that he hoped teams of érudits would bring to a conclusion in three years. Aside from a Tuscan translation of Vitruvius, Tolomei envisaged a complete survey of the aqueducts after Frontinus, a book of tombs, a map of Romana quadrata and later additions, with all attested buildings, roads, and gates with measurements in both ancient Roman and modern units. As Tolomei says, it would, in a manner, call forth from her tomb Rome, dead but now resurrected, if not as beautiful as she once was, at least with some semblance of her beauty.

[ella in certo modo trarrà del sepolcro la già morta Roma, e ridurrà in nuova vita, se non come prima bella, almeno con qualche sembianza o immagine di bellezza].

Piranesi would have seen himself as the man who could fulfill the long-delayed program of Tolomeii’s academy. Bottari was against the vanity of dedications and did not sign his own books, believing simply in the circulation of ideas. Piranesi, on the contrary, calculated the effect of every dedication. But when the dedication of the Antichità romane to Lord Charlemont fell through, one can sense the spirit of Bottari in the new dedication that took its place on all further copies of the book: “to his age, to posterity, and to the public weal” [“AEVO SVO POSTERIS ET UTILITY PATRIBUS PUBLICIS”] (Fig. 14).


160 Tolomei in Bottari, Raccolta di lettere, p. 10.
Myra Nan Rosenfield feels that it was through Bottari that Piranesi came to know the concept of the sublime.\textsuperscript{161} Bottari owned the 1709 Amsterdam edition of the \textit{Oeuvres} of Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, the translator into French of the works of pseudo-Longinus, \textit{Traité du sublime, ou du merveilleux dans le discours, traduit du Grec de Longin}. It is the concept of the sublime, filtered down from the Greek and conveyed to Piranesi both in Giobbe's library and in contacts with the \textit{pensionnaires} of the French Academy, that Piranesi is referring to his famous lines in the dedication to Giobbe of the \textit{Prima parte di architettura}:

that vast extent of space that at one time the Circuses, the Fora, and the Imperial Palaces occupied: I will tell you only that of such images these speaking ruins have filled my spirit, that drawings, although very accurate, even those of the immortal Palladio, have not succeeded in evoking...

[quella vasta ampiezza di spazio, che una volta occupavano i Circhi, i Fori, o g’Imperi Palagi: io vi dirò solamente, che di tali immagini mi hanno riempito lo spirito queste parlanti ruine, che di simili non arrivai a potermene mai formare sopra i disegni, benché accuratissimi, che di queste stesse ha fatto l’immortale Palladio...].\textsuperscript{162}

Let us return to the question of the authorship of the text of the \textit{Campus Martius}. We have an artist with a passion for ancient literature and surely a working knowledge of Latin,\textsuperscript{163} but one who had little time for scholarly compilation. A Solomonic solution, and I think the likely one, is to separate text from notes and assign them to different authors. The text would be due largely to the artist’s learned friends, but the notes would be Piranesi’s own. In any case, in the \textit{Campus Martius}, the usual roles of text and notes are reversed. The text exhibits a dry apparatus where 312 monuments are put into chronological order on the basis of what one assumes

\textsuperscript{161} Myra Nan Rosenfield, “Picturesque to Sublime: Piranesi’s Stylistic and Technical Development from 1740 to 1761”, in \textit{The Serpent and the Stylus}, pp. 55-91.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., p. 87.

\textsuperscript{163} In addition to the conscious irony in his use of Latin quotations (Silvia Gavuzzo-Stewart, “Gli ‘errori’ di G.B. Piranesi”, in \textit{In amicitia: Essays in Honour of Giulio Lepschy}, ed. Zygmunt Baranski and Lino Pertile (\textit{The Italianist} 17, supplement), Reading, 1997, pp. 348-65) one might add the importance of grammatical points, like the plural “collis hortulorum”, as opposed to the standard “collis hortulorum”, which was a foundational argument for Piranesi’s long \textit{Campus Martius}. 
to have been a huge card file, amassing references from the entire range of Latin literature in Plattner-Ashby fashion. This must be the work of Piremei or another learned assistant. On the other hand, the first chapter, with it passionate defense of the long Campus Martius, and all of the notes, extensive and fiery, exhibit the pugnacious erudition that we associate with Piranesi. Time and again we hear his voice, as he points out ruins, wrangles with modern antiquarians, alludes to fragments of the Marble Plan, retraces the steps of Flaminio Vacca in the cellars and basements of houses, and even interviews men who had dug foundations decades earlier. Piranesi knew the sources well but delighted in contentious, counterintuitive interpretations of them. The eye ruled his judgment and gave answers when texts were lacking, as when he saw, or thought he saw, the ruins of the “real” Pons Mulvius upstream from the Ponte Molle:

Besides, if we had to exclude the existence of this bridge just because no source makes mention of it, how many monuments would we have to do without, even though we can see them with our own eyes, just because there is no ancient testimony? If the sources are silent, I believe one should lend an ear as the ruins and the stones speak.

[Peraltro, se questo ponte non si ha da ammettere, perché gli scrittori non ne hanno fatto menzione, di quante cose resteremo noi privi, che pur le miriamo con gli occhi, per non trovarcene veruna memoria in iscritto? ... Ma se taccion le lettere, credo che si debba porger l'orecchio, mentre parlano le rovine, ed i sassi].

In the five years that intervened between the publication of the Antichità romane in 1756-57 and the Campus Martius in 1762, Piranesi was girding himself for combat. In these circumstances, he needed all the erudite help that he could get. In 1757 he published his exchange of letters with Lord Charlemont, which gave him a chance to deface the memory of his reluctant patron all over again, but also to cast himself as a new Horace – Horace the poet, who felt free to write directly to the emperor without middlemen, and Horace the artist, who created work more lasting than bronze:

I dare to believe, like Horace, I have completed a work that will go down to posterity and that will endure as long as there are those curi-

164 Campus Martius, p. 29, note c.
ous to know what remained in our day of the ruins of the most famous city of the universe.

[ardisco credere, come Orazio, d'aver finito un'opera, che passerà alla posterità, e che durerà sin tanto che vi saranno de' curiosi di conoscer ciò, ch'è rimaneva nel nostro secolo delle rovine della più famosa città dell'universo].

In 1753, the abbé Laugier had opened a Graeco-Roman controversy with the statement that perfect architecture is owed to the Greeks; by adding to Greek architecture, the Romans only demonstrated that one could not add to perfection. In 1758, Le Roy published his book on Athens, Les ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce, beating out Stuart and Revett and providing the first accurate details of Greek architecture. On reading it, Piranesi went into attack mode. He had already been preparing a polemic on the superiority of Roman architecture to Greek, but the appearance of Le Roy’s book caused him to enlarge it. It finally came out in 1761 as Della magnificenza ed architettura dei Romani. The text attacks Le Roy with sarcasm, while the plates attack with irony. Piranesi maintains that the Romans knew mathematics, painting, and sculpture before contact with Greece; that they followed indigenous traditions; that Greek architecture is full of defects, while Roman is full of ideas that never occurred to the Greeks. The plates enlist unadorned Etruscan simplicity (the Cloaca Maxima) and decorative overgrowth to support the case for Roman superiority. In a display of virtuoso technique, Piranesi contrasts Le Roy’s rendering of an Ionic capital from the Erechtheion (engraved in thin lines) with the abundant variety of Roman Ionic capitals (all deeply etched); the Bocca della Verità is added to the plate as if to say, Who is telling the truth? In this environment, Piranesi’s genius as an etcher gave him the upper hand, but so did the erudition (augmented in part by unnamed helpers) displayed in his latest books.

Piranesi’s contentious erudition brought him fame but not the distinction that he most wanted – the post of Commissario delle Antichità della Camera Apostolica, or Romanarum Antiquitatum Praeses. When the incumbent, Venuti, died in 1763, Piranesi was

166 Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Lettere di giustificazioni scritte a Milord Charlemont, Rome, 1757, p. xi. The reference to Horace is to Carmina III.30, “Exegi monumentum aere perennius”.

167 Kantor-Kazovsky, Piranesi, pp. 193-222.
mentioned as successor, but the position went instead to Winckelmann, whose *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* appeared in the following year. In 1765, Winckelmann seemed poised for a move to Berlin and Piranesi’s name was once again mentioned, but in the end the move did not occur. When Winckelmann was murdered in 1768, Piranesi was mentioned once more but still not chosen. There were other slights as well. A rival candidate, the abate Giovanni Cristofano Amaduzzi, who considered Piranesi’s Aventine church barbarous, rudely omitted any mention of Piranesi’s contribution to the study of the *Forma Urbis* when he drew up a second edition of Bellori’s book on it in 1764. Soon colder winds would be blowing, not only from Hellenizing architects but from Roman topographers.

6. Reception 1762-1960

Some of the grandest structures of Piranesi’s *Campus Martius* had short lives. The monumental Bustum Caesaris found no defenders. Even the antiquarian with whom he was most allied, Venuti, left the issue in respectful silence. As we have seen,

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170 Ridolfino Venuti, *Accurata, e succincta descrizione topografica delle antichità di Roma*, Rome, 1763; Monferini, “Ridolfino Venuti”, explores scholarly disputes between the two, both members of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of London; Pasquali, “Piranesi Architect”, p. 182: “Piranesi acted as the eyes through which Venuti, the letterato, could really observe the monuments of Rome, which he only knew through the ancient sources”. Venuti worked on the book for years, but it was only finished in the year of his death and published posthumously with the assistance of the banker Thomas Jenkins, who inserted some Piranesi prints.
Lumisden doubted it from the start, and soon excavations put an end to it. In 1777, during building operations in the Otto Cantoni neighborhood, Venuti found the remains of what he believed to be the actual ustrinum of Augustus just east of the Mausoleum. Six large cippi for funerary inscriptions bore the names of members of the family of Augustus with phrases such as “Hic crematus est”, “Hic situs (sita) est”. An alabaster urn was discovered with the ashes of Livilla, a sister of Caligula.\footnote{Boarwright, “The ‘Ara Ditii-Ustrinum of Hadrian’”, p. 495; Jollivet, “Ustrinum Augusti”, p. 97. Jollivet rejects the usual identification of this monument as the ustrinum or kaustra of Augustus, which he would place instead on top of the hill of Montecitorio.} It became evident that the Julio-Claudians were cremated quite close to the Mausoleum, not on the distant Pincian. This fit the pattern of the ustrinum of Antoninus Pius, which had been partly excavated near his column in 1703.\footnote{Boarwright, however (“The ‘Ara Ditii-Ustrinum of Hadrian”), sees the ustrinum of Antoninus Pius, as well as the ustrinum of Marcus Aurelius discovered in 1907 near Montecitorio, as exclusively commemorative monuments, and accepts only the remains discovered in 1777 as a genuine imperial ustrinum.} These precincts showed that imperial funerals did not need anywhere near as much space as Piranesi had given them.

In 1842, Ludwig Ulrichs recognized that Piazza Navona was the Stadium of Domitian, thus refuting all previous antiquarians from Ligorio to Piranesi, who thought it was a circus. A stadium is a Greek building type, while a circus is a Roman one. Stadia were used for foot races and athletics, while circuses were used for chariot races and gladiators. Piranesi knew of the existence of a stadium from literary sources and put it several hundred meters to the west of Piazza Navona, thus cluttering the Campus with two large racecourses when there was only need for one. Of course, too, the spina and carceres that he shows in Piazza Navona are entirely out of place in a stadium. But Ulrichs still adhered to the idea that the portico along Via Lata was the Saepta Iulia, and indeed went so far as to develop a theory of voting procedure based on the spaces available.\footnote{Ludwig Ulrichs, Beschreibung der Stadt Rom, Stuttgart and Berlin, 1842, 3, p. 105, and idem, “Über das Verfahren bei den Abstimmungen des römischen Volks in den Saepta”, Rheinisches Museum für Philologie, n.f., I, 1842, p. 404, cited in Sjöqvist, “Studi archeologici”, p. 51.}

Between 1830 and 1850, the prolific antiquarian Luigi Canina (1795-1856) published four editions of his Pianta topografica di
Roma antica. Like Piranesi, he tried to insert fragments of the Marble Plan into the topography of the modern city, but with greater caution. He saw the need for considerable retrenchment. He rejected the long Campus Martius, and his map stops at Porta del Popolo. The long, straight Via Lata is back. Instead of the great Bustoem Caesaris, there is just a small ustrinum near the Mausoleum of Augustus. The sundial of Augustus is much reduced, as are the Horti Sallustiani. To Piranesi’s credit, the “Circus of Flora” and the Circus of Sallust remain where he had put them, as do the three theaters in the Campus Martius, but the Amphitheater of Statilius Taurus is moved from Montecitorio to Monte Giordano.

Canina was uneasy about Piranesi’s location of the -LIA fragment, since the three large courtyards set at an oblique angle to the long portico did not seem to agree with finds on the east side of the Via Lata, around Santi Apostoli. But he could not deny that the remains under Santa Maria in Via Lata and under so many palaces on the west side of the Corso seemed to fit the long porticus on the -LIA fragment very well. His solution was to rotate the fragment 180 degrees, so that the three courtyards now stood on the west side of Via Lata, under the Collegio Romano and the adjacent buildings. Here the -LIA fragment sat uneasily for a generation. The new position was accepted by Jordan in 1874, but rejected by the two leading topographers of the 1890s, Lanciani and Hülser. Both of them rotated the -LIA fragment back again to the position it occupied in Piranesi’s plan, with the three large courtyards on the east side of Via Lata.

Christian Hülser admired Piranesi and argued the merits of his “grande e fantastica iconografia del Campo Marzio” in a magisterial article of 1893. He reasoned that Piranesi had gotten the scale of the Forma Urbis right (he thought of it as 1:250, though modern

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174 Luigi Canina, Pianta topografica di Roma antica con i principali monumenti ideati nel loro primitivo stato secondo le ultime scoperte e con i frammenti della marmorea pianta capitolina disposti nel suo d’intorno, Rome, 1830 (a large foldout plan of all Rome); 2nd ed., 1832; idem, Indicazione topografica di Roma antica, distribuita nelle XV regioni, 3rd ed., Rome, 1841 (a small textbook with plates); idem, Gli edifici di Roma antica cogniti per alcune reliquie, descritti e dimostrati nell’intera loro architettura, Rome, 1848, vol. II, pl. ii.


research puts it at 1:246), and that he had been right as well about
the position of the -LIA fragment. Piranesi, we will remember, had
put the Saepta not in the long portico but in the three large cour-
yards on the far side of the Via Lata. But Hülsen identified the
courtyards as the Cohors I Vigilum, the barracks of the first cohort
of the city watchmen, so for him, the long portico was itself the
Saepta. It extends in his plan for an amazing eighty bays, from the
southern end of Piazza Venezia to the Aqua Virgo, in front of the
Collegio Romano on the north. No one before or after made the
portico that long. It is instructive to read the intellectual contor-
tions with which Hülsen squeezed the voting patterns of the eighty-
two Comitia Centuriata (or army assemblies) and the thirty-five
Comitia Tributa ("tribal", or citizens' assemblies) into the eighty (or
eighty-two) compartments of the portico. To find space for the
many huge meetings and public entertainments that the literary
sources tell us took place in the Saepta, and for Caligula's giant
ship, Hülsen kept a large open space clear to the west of the por-
tico. He needed to find space nearby for the Diritorium, the
building with a roof of record span in which nine hundred Augustan
officials counted the votes cast in the Saepta. He reasoned that
there was no other place for it than over the portico, which was
why the piers of the portico were so thick. In his reconstruction,
the famous wooden beams a hundred Roman feet long would have
roofed a central hall of this upper story.  

Rodolfo Lanciani, too, left the southern Campus Martius more
or less as Piranesi had envisaged it. He had already argued in 1891
that Canina had been wrong to rotate the -LIA fragment 180
degrees, so he rotated it back to Piranesi's original position. Here
it remained on his great Forma Urbis Romae of 1893-1901. Lanciani
accepted the long portico of the -LIA fragment as the Saepta. He
left other Piranesi identifications intact, such as the location of the
Theatrum Balbi under the ruins of Monte Cenci. However, he
altered Piranesi's disposition of the Circus Flaminius. Although
Lanciani still saw the curved end of the circus in the remains under

177 Cassius Dio, LIX.10.5.
178 Hülsen, "I Saepta ed il Diritorium", pp. 135-36, on voting patterns, and
pp. 136-41 on the Diritorium on the upper level.
179 Rodolfo Lanciani, L'itinerario di Einsiedeln e l'ordine di Benedetto Cano-
nico, Rome, 1891, p. 39.
Palazzo Mattei, as Piranesi did, he rotated the body of the circus ninety degrees clockwise and gave it an east-west alignment, not north-south, as Piranesi strangely had it. The arches of the circus now ran along the Via delle Botteghe Oscure. Etymology was still a valid antiquarian tool, and Lanciani saw the “apothecae obscuroae”, as generations had before him, as the arches of the circus turned into dwellings in the Middle Ages.

Lanciani was more sober than any of his predecessors and more reluctant to accept conjecture. In the northern Campus Martius, he lay to rest all vestiges of the great Piranesian busta around the two imperial mausolea. But his Forma Urbis Romae allowed Piranesi’s arrangement of the southern Campus Martius to stand.180 This was the Indian summer of Piranesi’s Ichnographia, at least for the key identifications of its southern region. For these the reprieve would last another quarter century.

Lanciani’s monumental publication influenced the two large models of ancient Rome made in the early twentieth century. The better-known one is the great model, or “plastico”, made by Italo Gismondi for the planned Universal Exhibition of 1942, and now in the Museo della Civiltà Romana (EUR) in Rome. The lesser-known model is that built by Paul Bigot (1870-1942) and now in the Musées royaux d’Art et d’Histoire in Brussels.181 His first draft of a model of ancient Rome was shown in 1911 and is now in Caen. Bigot updated it in 1937, but did not incorporate the revolutionary discoveries of that decade. In the update, the buildings along the southern Corso are still determined by the LIA fragment. The Circus Flaminius is still north of the Portico d’Ottavia, with its north flank defined by the line of the future Via delle Botteghe Oscure. At that point, it seemed that there would be no further revolutions in the topography of ancient Rome, and the image of the ancient city could be fixed in vast models. But an earthquake was about to happen.

180 Lanciani, Storia degli scavi, I, p. 169, still accepts Piranesi’s placement of the Saepta between Santa Maria in Via Lata and Piazza Venezia.

Guglielmo Gatti

The Samson who would knock down the last pillars of the synthesis Piranesi had helped to erect was Guglielmo Gatti (1905-1981). This autodidact topographer and dedicated scourge of the Piranesian synthesis was three generations in the making. Guglielmo’s grandfather, Giuseppe Gatti (1838-1914), was for thirty years the friend and secretary of the early-Christian archaeologist G.B. De Rossi and his continuator for the volume *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae Septimo Saeculo Antiquiores*, published posthumously in 1915. Guglielmo’s father, Edoardo Gatti (1875-1928), entered the Ufficio Scavi di Roma e Suburbio in 1900; recording emergency excavations occasioned by the expansion of Rome would remain his métier for life. He formed a precious topographical archive, always arriving immediately on the site of any new finds. From 1906, he was the principal inspector of the Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma. The post was suppressed after the arrival of Fascism in 1923, but Edoardo was kept on as the person in charge of revising Lanciani’s *Forma Urbis*, and he continued to visit excavations all over Rome. The Commissione Archeologica published his extensive surveys in 1925 and 1926. In excavating the underground basilica at Porta Maggiore, he contracted a disease that afflicted him for the last decade of his life, and from which he died in 1928.

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183 *Bollettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma* 52, 1924, pp. 279-86; 53, 1925, pp. 271-304. Edoardo Gatti prepared measured drawings of the Mausoleum of Augustus in 1926, which were later completed by his son (Guglielmo Gatti, “Il Mausoleo di Augusto: Studio di ricostruzione”, *Capitolium* 10, 1934, p. 469, n. 1). In 1924, he reported the protest of the Commissione against the expropriation of the library and property of Christian Hülsen (then living in via Marignolle 6, Florence), requesting Minister Gentile to grant to Hülsen the exemption that had been granted to several other German scholars. In the same report, he noted the decision of the Commissione to open an investigation of the *Forma Urbis*, while submitting a request to the city to remove the fragments displayed on the wall of Palazzo dei Conservatori and replace them with marble copies. See Edoardo Gatti, “Arti della Commissione (Anni 1923-1924)”, *Bollettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma* LII, 1924, pp. 280 and 284.

The presence of his father and grandfather looms large in Guglielmo Gatti's publications. From his earliest work on the fragments of the *Forma Urbis*, he was intent on applying the exacting standards and earthbound observations of Giuseppe and Edoardo Gatti to bring down the prevailing synthesis. He did this in three blows in 1934, 1937, and 1960.

The first was an attack on the location of the -LIA fragment. Topographers had become used to considering the oblique angle between the long portico and the three adjacent courtyards a surveying error in the *Forma Urbis*. Gatti's high respect for the Marble Plan, however, prevented him from accepting this. Furthermore, the buildings shown on the fragment would have extended far into Piazza Venezia, yet no such buildings were found when excavations were carried out in 1904-06 for the headquarters of the Assicurazioni Generali, the modern twin of Palazzo Venezia. Gatti's grandfather Giuseppe had been present and had left him his sketches, which show instead the exedra of the Temple of Trajan on this site. There was no room for intrusion from Piranesi's fantasies. The -LIA fragment, after sitting comfortably at the beginning of Via Lata for a century and a half, had to be pried loose and put elsewhere. But where might it go?

In 1934, a student still at work on her laurea at the university asked Gatti's permission to study his father's drawings of the Emporio area in Regione XIII, near Testaccio. Side by side they studied the plans; a singular chemistry, personal and intellectual, was at work. Waking up the next morning, Gatti had a flash of insight ("mi balenò alla mente una specie di folgorazione"). He had found the real site of the -LIA fragment. It showed not the Saepta but rather the Emporium near the Tiber. The three courtyards represented the Horrea Galbae, and the long portico the *porticus aemilia*. This huge concrete warehouse had been built by M. Aemilius Lepidus and M. Aemilius Paulus in 192 B.C., and was then rebuilt in 174 B.C.\(^{185}\). Edoardo Gatti had followed discoveries in the

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\(^{185}\) Nash, Pictorial Dictionary, I, pp. 481-84, and II, pp. 238-40; F. Coarelli, in *Lexicon Topographicum*, "Horrea Galbana", III, pp. 40-42, and "Porticus Aemilia", IV, pp. 116-17. Although Gatti's association of the -LIA fragment with the concrete structures situated between Monte Testaccio and the Tiber is now universally accepted, Richardson (A New Topographical Dictionary, pp. 143-44) remained skeptical of their identification as the Porticus Aemilia. Recently, by completing the -LIA fragment as "*navi LIA*", the building has been identified as the Navalia, or shipyards,
rapidly urbanizing Testaccio quarter, where the warehouse was located, with a particular intensity in 1911-14. Guglielmo was himself present at excavations in 1928 and 1932. Using his father’s observations, he reconstructed the Porticus Aemilia with fifty chambers, totaling 487 meters in length. It originally faced a vast open area for handling cargo on the Tiber bank, which was eventually cluttered with smaller buildings in the imperial era.

Gatti was jubilant. The -LIA fragment had finally been removed from the Campus Martius. Gatti wrote up his discovery with great care and published it in 1934. He married the student who had offered such stimulating company, and they named their first son Galba.186

Piranesi had himself seen the similarities between the Porticus Aemilia warehouse and the endless portico on the -LIA fragment,187 and an etching in the Antichità romane compares them in plan. But blinded by the reading “saepta iulIA”, Piranesi missed the correct reading, “porticus aemILIA”. This did not stop him from examining the Porticus Aemilia closely, however, and his hypothetical elevation of one of the chambers of the warehouse eventually influenced Gatti’s own reconstruction.188

Once Gatti removed the -LIA fragment, the whole physiognomy of the southern Campus Martius began to change. One senses his iconoclastic pride in the concluding words of the article:


187 Piranesi, Le antichità romane, IV, pl. XXXVIII; Gatti “Io e la Forum Urbis”, 1979, p. 268 (in Gatti 1989, p. 5) noticed that Lunciani had also noted the similarity of the courtyard buildings on the -LIA fragment and the Horrea Galbana, though he did not go one step further and identify the fragment with them. The -LIA fragment is illustrated in its new context in Nash, Pictorial Dictionary, I, pp. 481f.

188 Antichità romane, I, pl. 20, and IV, pl. 48; Gatti (“Saepta Iulia” e ‘porticus Aemilia’ nella ‘Forma’ severiana”, pp. 138-39) cites instead the reconstruction in the 1788 edition of R. Fabretti, De Aquis et Aquaeductibus veteris Romae, 3.xv, pls. v.vv.
I would hope that, now that the Campus Martius is freed from the fragments known as Jordan 35-36 (the 'LIA fragment), one can, without harmful assumptions, clarify that important part of the topography of ancient Rome, which has hitherto been problematic, mainly because the fragments of the Severan plan have for nearly four centuries imposed interpretations on the remains that have come to light from 1600 to the present day, falsifying planimetric representation and misleading, in a way not easily rectifiable, the understanding of buildings that had such an important role in the civic and political life of Rome.

[Voglio auguraromi ora che, liberato il Campo Marzio dai frammenti Jordan 35-36, si possa, senza presupposti dannosi, chiarire quella parte tanto importante dell’antica Roma; cosa che è stata finora difficile a causa soprattutto dei frammenti della forma severiana, che hanno, per circa quattro secoli, imposto la interpretazione dei resti monumentalì tornati in luce dal 1600 ad oggi, falsandone la rappresentazione planimetrica e fuorviando, in modo non facilmente rettificabile, la esatta comprensione di edifici che tanta parte ebbero nella vita civile e politica di Roma.]

If the Saepta was no longer to be found along the Via Lata, however, where was it? Gatti made his second iconoclastic proposal in 1937, when he recomposed fragments of the Severan plan to locate the Saepta between the Pantheon and the Baths of Agrippa on one side, and the Iseum et Serapeum and Villa Publica on the other. The Swedish scholar Lundström had already taken the first step in this direction in 1929. The letters M ... GRI on separate fragments of the *Forma Urbis* had been read by Hülsen as "*monumentum aGRippae*", meaning Agrippa's tomb, but Lundström combined these with another fragment to read "*porticus MeleaGRI*", that is, the Portico of Meleager, which was known from literary sources to run along the east side of the Saepta. But Lundström stopped short of the final solution. He interpreted the large letters AE ... VLI as "*AEdes iVLIorum*", the tomb or monument of the Julii. Gatti saw in a flash the true reading: "sAEpta iVLIa". The voting precinct lay next to the site of the future Pantheon.

189 Gatti, "Saepta Iulia' e 'porticus Aemilia", p. 149.

The Saepta in its new location fit all the parameters set by the texts and by finds on the site. It was bounded by the arches of the Aqua Virgo on the north, a luminous confirmation, Gatti said, of Frontinus's assertion that this aqueduct set the northern boundary of the complex. On the south it abutted the Diribitorium, where the votes taken in the Saepta were counted. This, too, was confirmed by a fragment of the Severan plan. On the long west side of the Saepta ran the Porticus Aragonautorum, remains of which can still be seen close to the rotunda of the Pantheon, while on the east side ran the Porticus Meleagri. In the middle of the Porticus Meleagri stood the so-called "Arco della Minerva", a huge Hadrianic tetrapylon, the largest in the city, which served as passage from the Saepta to the Iseum and Serapeum.¹⁹¹

Totally unlike the portico on the -LIA fragment, the Saepta turned out to be an open space after all, used less for voting, as the constitution of the Republic changed, than for large assemblies. By the second half of the first century, it had become the bazaar described by Martial for the display of luxury goods from all over the empire. There was finally space enough in Gatti’s reconstruction for Caligula’s famous ship, and the adjacent Iseum and Serapeum were exactly in the right place for the many obelisks and Egyptianizing antiquities that had been found since the Renaissance in the area behind Santa Maria Sopra Minerva.¹⁹² Once again Gatti was jubilant.

Gatti’s third onslaught on the prevailing synthesis came in 1960. The Commissione Archeologica del Comune di Roma had undertaken a new study of the Marble Plan in 1924, entrusting it to Edoardo Gatti. He died in 1928, but his son Guglielmo took his place. The publication was interrupted by the war. By 1955 it was ready, but it was delayed five more years to allow a thorough study of the wall in the Forum Pacis, where the map had been exhibited, and of the clamps with which it had been attached. The great book was finally published in 1960 by four authors: Gatti, Carettoni, and

¹⁹² F. Coarelli, “Iseum et Serapeum in Campo Martius; Isis Campensis”. 
Colini, who had worked on the project since 1931, and Cozza, who had joined later. In the preface, they speak of the extraordinary results of this massive project: "The results reached are truly remarkable, and can be considered definitive in some respects" ["i risultati raggiunti sono veramente notevoli e, sotto alcuni aspetti, possono considerarsi definitivi"]. A great example of teamwork, the book was also a summa of the research of three generations of Gattis.

No sooner was the book off the press, however, than Gatti saw the falsity of two more long-held suppositions. The 1960 edition of the Forma Urbis still presented the location of the exedra of the Circus Flaminius as being under the Isola dei Mutei, although, in following Lanciani, the authors had shown the body of the circus running east-west and its arches lining the Via delle Botteghe Oscure. Following Piranesi, they had still interpreted the ruins under Monte Cenci as the Theatrum Balbi. Then, with a fresh copy of the new book in hand, Gatti saw the light. On 1 July 1960, he held a lecture in Palazzo Braschi, which was overflowing with the elite of the Roman archaeological world, to announce that this was all wrong, and "upsetting in one stroke the consensus that was at one time held by all as accepted without discussion" ["sconvolgendo di colpo le conoscenze, ritenute allora da tutti acquisite ed indiscutibili"], he saw that the Circus Flaminius and the Crypta Balbi had to change places.

A fragment of the Marble Plan with the inscription "CIRCUS FLAMINIUS" had long been known, but was left without precise location in the 1960 edition of the Marble Plan. Gatti’s sudden new insight was to see that a line on that fragment joined up with a line on another fragment showing the Porticus Octaviae. The Circus Flaminius was thus nowhere near the Via delle Botteghe Oscure, but instead occupied the area bounded by the Porticus Octaviae, the Theater of Marcellus, and the Tiber, extending as far to the west as Monte Cenci. It thus roughly coincides with the Renaissance Ghetto. A brilliant "combaciamento", or matching, of frag-

193 Carettoni, Colini, Cozza, and Gatti, La pianta marmorea di Roma antica (Forma urbis Romae).

ments of the Marble Plan put it here, but to make sense of the situation, the whole notion of circus had to be rethought.\textsuperscript{195}

The Circus Flaminius had its origins in the third century B.C. The Prata Flaminia had been private land that a member of the gens Flaminia gave to the city. The income it generated was used for horse races and the surplus to pay for the construction of the Via Flaminia in 221 B.C. According to Coarelli, the Circus Flaminius was a circus, although with wooden rather than stone grandstands. According to the more radical interpretation of Wiseman, however, the name did not denote a real circus at all, but was a toponym for a grassy area of a generally round shape. A number of temples that included “in circo” in their dedications bordered on this area: Apollo, Bellona, Neptune, Hercules Musarum, Pegas, Juno Regina, Diana, Iuppiter Stator, Mars, Hercules Custos, and Castor et Pollux. Eventually, the rededicated temples of Bellona and of Apollo “ad summos circus” encroached on the open area, as did the vast Theater of Marcellus. The ludi plebei took place here, and the area long maintained its association with the plebs. An early connection with military triumph would also endure, and the route that connected the Trigarium, the racing ground for horses, with the Prata Flaminia would later become the Via Triumpha-

lis. By the early empire, the Circus Flaminius had become quite restricted, but it was still associated with the triumphal procession to the Capitoline.

If the Circus Flaminius no longer lay along the Via delle Botteghe Oscure, then what was the building that stood there, and what were the semicircular foundations under Palazzo Mattei? Gatti moved the Theatrum Balbi from Monte Cenci, where Piranesi had put it, to the terrain under Palazzo Mattei.\textsuperscript{196} Along with the


\textsuperscript{196} This is where the Renaissance antiquarian Francesco Albertini had put it, but the combined influence of Ligorio and Piranesi had dissuaded topographers from exploring the idea. See Giuseppe Marchetti Longhi, “Circus Flaminius: Note
Theatrum Balbi went the Crypta Balbi, which would run along the Via delle Botteghe Oscure. The center of the Crypta Balbi would thus lie in the monastery garden of Santa Caterina dei Funari. Here Flavio Biondo had seen a curved wall and so had Nolli (1001), and now it was clear that this curved wall was the exedra of the Crypta Balbi.

Far from being arcane manipulations of fragments, Gatti’s swap had a sensational impact on the world of Roman archaeology. As Giuseppe Lugli wrote in Corriere della Sera a few days later, “The great discoveries came, or rather exploded like a bomb, but a few days’ distance from the publication of the volume” [“Le novità grosse sono venute, anzi son scoppiate come una bomba, a pochi giorni di distanza dalla pubblicazione del volume”]. Gatti said that the big book was merely meant to be “un istituto di lavoro” and that he was simply the first to use it. However, there was discontent, too. How could one take the Circus Flaminius away from the “apothecae obscurae”, the shops that had been explained for centuries as vestiges of the arches of a circus? Giuseppe Marchetti Longhi, who had written the first modern monograph on the Circus Flaminius and been the excavator of the temples in the di topografia di Roma antica e medioevale”, Memorie dell’Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, series 5, XVI, 1920, pp. 663, n. 2, quoting from Francesco Albertini, Opusculum de mirabilibus novae et veteris urbis Romae, ed. A. Schmarsow, fol. 24; the more conventional opinions of Biondo, Andrea Fulvio, and Ligorio are cited on pp. 663-66. Albertini’s passage led Gatti to his revolutionary conclusions (“Dove erano situati il Teatro di Balbo e il Circo Flaminio?” p. 6).

197 Flavio Biondo, De Roma Instaurata, III.109, p. 25, on the garden of Santa Maria Domine Rose, the monastery that preceded S. Caterina ai Funari: “exterior muri pinna in girum arcuata”, quoted in Marchetti Longhi, “Circus Flaminius”, p. 666, along with medieval documents calling the curved wall a trullum.


199 “Gi.Si.”, in Il Tempo, 2 July 1960. Even without the update of July 1960, the Forma urbis Romae was seen to be an invaluable contribution. Herbert Bloch’s long review (“A New Edition of the Marble Plan of Ancient Rome”, Journal of Roman Studies 51, 1961, pp. 143-32) points out that the task of assembling and studying the fragments had been begun by Edoardo Gatti. The relocation of the Basilica Aemilia and the Saepta Julia was nothing less than epochal: “The article of 1935 in particular set an end to the hit-or-miss approach of the past in using the fragments of the Forma Urbis”.
Largo Argentina, expressed his skepticism in an article of 1970. He wanted proven certainties, not clever hypotheses. He himself was heir to a topographical tradition beginning in the Quattrocento, which was not to be overturned by “a simple stroke of a hoe” (“un semplice colpo di zappa”); neither was “an honest age-old work” (“un onesto secolare lavoro”) to be declared false without proof. His doubts pour forth with considerable sarcasm:

[Mine is] a fitting and proper reaction against hypotheses which, however clever, are put out as certainties so obvious and so natural that there is not even a need to explain why they did not appear as such to the honest research of so many earlier scholars, the undersigned modestly included. It seems, instead, that the multiplicity of problems that have arisen refutes the evidence and belies the worthlessness attributed to those who have not been able to see it.

[una doverosa reazione contro affermazioni, sia pure geniali, conclamate quali certezze, e tanto naturali e tanto di chiara evidenza da non poter spiegare come non siano apparse tali alle precedenti oneste ricerche di tanti e tanti studiosi, compreso il modesto scrivente. Ci sembra, invece, che la molteplicità dei problemi proposti, smentisca proprio quella evidenza e la dappocchia di chi non ha saputo vederla].

In 1971, Gatti published his definitive statement of the swap between the Circus Flaminius and the Crypta Balbi in the same journal in which Marchetti Longhi had published the previous year. Their differences were irreconcilable, and could only be settled by excavation. Marchetti Longhi began with some inconclusive probes in the garden behind Santa Caterina dei Funari in 1961 and 1962, but when a major excavation campaign was undertaken in 1981, it proved Gatti right, and led to the establishment of the celebrated Crypta Balbi Museum on the Via delle Botteghe Oscure.

200 Marchetti Longhi, “Circus Flaminius” (an article still valuable for the medieval topography of the area even though the location of the Circus Flaminius was proven erroneous); idem, “Nuovi aspetti della topografia dell’antico Campo Marzio di Roma: Circo Flaminio o Teatro di Balbo?”, Mélanges de l’École Française de Rome, 82.1, 1970, pp. 117-58.


202 Gatti, “Il teatro e la cripta di Balbo in Roma”.

203 The seven volumes of excavation reports, Archeologia urbana a Roma: Il progetto della Crypta Balbi, are summarized in Daniele Manacorda, Crypta Balbi: Archeologia e storia di un paesaggio urbano, Rome, 2001, with a valuable bibliogra-
What was to become of the mountain of ruins under San Tommaso in Cenci? Piranesi had explored them and shown them in an etching in the *Campus Martius*; he was the first to associate them with the Theater of Balbus. This fit his view that all the monti of the Campus Martius were not natural hills but rather the ruins of theaters and amphitheaters. He had gone a step further and aligned the supposed theater with the large portico, composed of piers with attached semicolumns and a niche-studded wall at the core, which still stood in fragmentary form on the Via di Santa Maria de' Calderari. The portico had been studied since the days of Flavio Biondo and drawn by Giuliano da Sangallo, Serlio, Battista da Sangallo, Antonio da Sangallo, Peruzzi, and Alò Giovanni. For these masters it had been the Porticus Pompeii, part of an enormous complex extending all the way from the Theater of Pompey and the Campo dei Fiori. But Piranesi had realized that this huge distance made any identification with Pompey untenable, and had identified the building instead as the Porticus Philippi. Lanciani had taken over Piranesi's alignment of theater and portico in his *Forma Urbis*, but for him it had seemed logical to associate both structures with the same builder and to see them as part of the same complex: the Theatrum and Crypta Balbi.

This identification held until 1960, but when Gatti moved the Theatrum and Crypta Balbi to the Via delle Botteghe Oscure the question arose, what stood under Monte Cenci? The answer came in 1980-81, when Emilio Rodríguez Almeida published a fragment of a second marble plan, which seems to show a Temple of Castor and Pollux, the Dioscuri, in this location. Indeed, this is the area...
where the statues of the Dioscuri now on the Cordonata of the Capitoline Hill were discovered in 1561, making such an identification highly probable.209 The former Porticus Pompeji (or Porticus Philippi for Piranesi, or Crypta Balbi for Lanciani), once the glory of Renaissance archaeology, shown in one of Giuliano da Sangallo’s most beautiful drawings and studied by Raphael, now represented by a pathetic brick arch on the Via di Santa Maria de’ Calderari, remains without a name.210

7. Conclusion

Two centuries of refutation have weighed heavily on Piranesi’s Campus Martius, most of it instigated by archaeologists who have played his game – placing fragments of the Marble Plan – better than he. In modern times, those genial sprites of Renaissance archaeology, conjecture and imagination, have had to make their peace with skepticism and doubt. As a contemporary classicist puts it,

Just as there will always be a need for brilliant hypotheses, so there is still wisdom in being prepared to acknowledge what we do not, and in


the light of present evidence, cannot, know. Both advance the study of topography.211

Piranesi, on the contrary, never said there was something we do not or cannot know.

Let me suggest, however, that there are three ways in which Piranesi still seems our contemporary. The first is the seriousness with which he took the death and burial of the emperors. Gibbon thought that deification was the only matter in which the early emperors were injudicious. Other Enlightenment writers tended to treat the concept and ceremonies of imperial apotheosis with scorn: the cage door that sticks, the eagle whose feathers are singed, the officer who has to climb the pyre to release it. All of this seemed the humbug of tyranny. Recent scholarship, however, has given us a much more nuanced understanding of apotheosis. The perspective is now more anthropological. The issues discussed include the ancestry of the rite in the noble funeral of the late Republic, the importance of the Senate in authorizing or withholding divinization, and the role of the Campus Martius as the setting for consecratio. Thirty-six out of the sixty emperors in the first three centuries were made divi, and temples were built to fourteen of them.212 If Piranesi exaggerated the architectural impact of divinization, he nonetheless intuited its centrality to the ideology of the empire.

Second, Piranesi envisaged the organic growth of the Campus Martius by linking urban form and political structure in a highly original way. His small maps on fictive papyrus scrolls show the colonization of the Tiber plain in steps that follow the evolution of Roman government and society (Figs. 16, 17). Early monuments leave a trace on the terrain even when they have been superseded. Forms change as functions shift from monarchy through tyranny,

republic, and empire. It is enough to compare these “scrolls” to the primitive woodcuts showing the growth of Rome in Calvo or Marliani to demonstrate Piranesi’s superiority as a student of urban form.

Third, Piranesi’s formative experience in baroque architecture allowed him to think in terms of axial relationships across large areas of urban terrain, hence the compulsion to fuse the Mausoleum of Augustus and the Muro Torto into one fantastic monument, or to forge a link between the Amphitheater of Statilius Taurus, the Gnomon Obelisk, and the Column of Antoninus Pius. No one accepts these specific connections anymore, but in recent times the search for relationships over space in the service of imperial ideology has become a guiding principle in the archaeology of the Campus Martius. A few examples may suffice. The excavation of the Horologium Augusti by the German Archaeological Institute in 1979-80 established an intimate connection between the sundial and the Ara Pacis Augusti. The shadow of the Gnomon Obelisk passing along the meridian line on September 23, which is the equinox but also Augustus’s birthday, would finish at sunset in the center of Augustus’s altar.²¹³ Other long-distance relationships have been proposed between the original Augustan Pantheon and the Altar of Mars, and between the Mausoleum, the Ustrinum, the Gnomon Obelisk, and the Temple of Hadrian.²¹⁴ Like Piranesi, but in a more critical spirit, archaeologists still look for optical relationships between distant monuments.

Piranesi’s imaginative “anatomizing” of the ruins was deeply informed by the cumulative learning of generations of antiquarians and by his own close examination of the surviving remains. He never retreated from his claim of “many years of tireless, most exact


observation, excavations, and researches – things that were never tried in the past.\textsuperscript{215} However much he was set on affirming the powers of the creative imagination to contemporary architects, he did not want to lose his audience of antiquarians and topographers. There is a bony core of certifiable ruins in the \textit{Ichnographia} that Piranesi fleshes out in ways that a late-Roman architect, or at least an erudite baroque architect drenched in archaeology, might find sympathetic. His conjectures are like those of a textual critic who has absorbed the diction and persona of the author he is editing so thoroughly that he can reconstruct lost lines and even fabricate missing texts. The \textit{Ichnographia} might strike the modern eye at first as an impossible fiction, but many of its identifications and imaginative flights are grounded in the physical remains, and almost all have some foundation in the texts. That is why a part of Piranesi's synthesis lasted so long, and why some of his principles have remained valid even after most of his specific reconstructions have been toppled.

\textsuperscript{215} \textit{Le antichità romane}, I, preface.