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# Ancient Art and the Antiquarian: The Forgery of Giuseppe Guerra, 1755–1765

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Tamara Griggs

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**ABSTRACT** How did eighteenth-century scholars and art connoisseurs understand the difference between ancient and modern works of art? In 1755, at the height of the classical revival, Giuseppe Guerra, a minor painter in Rome, sold hundreds of counterfeit paintings to kings, cardinals, and collectors who considered themselves learned devotees of the antique. Tamara Griggs uses Guerra's forgery as a case study for understanding the link between eighteenth-century antiquarianism, art connoisseurship, and historiography. **KEYWORDS:** Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières; Jean-Jacques Barthélemy; Charles de La Condamine; Paolo Maria Paciaudi; Johann Winckelmann

OVER A CENTURY AGO, art historians and literary scholars began to pay attention to the classical revival of the eighteenth century. Through their wide-ranging studies of literature, theater, art, poetry, and travel journals, these historians advanced the notion that the eighteenth century underwent a revolution in taste based on the recovery of classical antiquity. During this period, they noted, a new generation of scholars and artists, shaped by learned societies and academies, articulated a new feeling for travel, for primitive poetry, and for the visual arts.<sup>1</sup> This was the view of the Age of Antiquaries that Arnaldo Momigliano set out to modify in his classic article “Ancient History and the Antiquarian” (1950). The eighteenth century, Momigliano argued, experienced “not only a revolution in taste,” but “a revolution in historical method as well.”<sup>2</sup> Momigliano's survey of the rise and fall of antiquarianism as a chapter in

1. See, for example, Louis Hautecoeur, *Rome et la renaissance de l'antiquité à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1912); and Maurice Badolle, *Labbé Jean-Jacques Barthélemy et l'Hellénisme en France dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1926).

2. The synthesis of antiquarian research methods and the philosophical narrative history of the Enlightenment was at the heart of this historical revolution. See Arnaldo Momigliano, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13 (1950): 285–315, esp. 286. See also “The Rise of Antiquarian Research” (1961–62), *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990). For new research into eighteenth-century narrative history, see

ancient historiography established the importance of the antiquary's methods and motives to the discipline of history itself, but it left unresolved a particular question: What did the revolution in taste have to do with the revolution in historical method?

Part of the problem in answering this question has to do with Momigliano's argument about the role of Pyrrhonism, or radical skepticism, in the development of modern history.<sup>3</sup> Pyrrhonism in historical study was a part of the older skeptical tradition and involved a debate about the reliability of primary sources for historical knowledge, an argument that became quite fierce in the final decades of the seventeenth century, when antiquarian materials were asked to solve the problem of untrustworthy textual narratives.<sup>4</sup> The antiquaries who examined coins, inscriptions, and original documents rescued history, according to Momigliano, by contributing to the development of history's ancillary disciplines (numismatics, epigraphy, and diplomatics).

Yet there were plenty of antiquaries who devoted themselves to nonliterary materials before the crisis of Pyrrhonism and many afterward who did not seem burdened by the legacy of doubt. Because he insisted that skepticism was *the* driving force of antiquarian studies in the late seventeenth century, Momigliano was unable to account for eighteenth-century antiquaries' interpretations of the visual arts of antiquity.<sup>5</sup> In his view, these scholars failed to generate a set of rules for the figurative arts to match those of epigraphy, diplomatics, and numismatics. Yet if we allow for motivations other than philosophical skepticism, we can better understand the eighteenth-century antiquaries who were instrumental in establishing an aesthetic framework for understanding the ancient past. Like parallel cards in a stereoscopic picture, the aesthetic revolution and the historical revolution need to be viewed in a single frame to bring out their true dimensions.<sup>6</sup>

Mark Salber Phillips, "Reconsiderations on History and Antiquarianism: Arnaldo Momigliano and the Historiography of Great Britain," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1996): 297–316; and Giovanna Ceserani, "Narrative, Interpretation, and Plagiarism in Mr. Robertson's 1778 *History of Ancient Greece*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66 (2005): 413–36.

3. On the wider tradition, see Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 2003).

4. See Carlo Borghero, *Certeza e la storia: Cartesianesimo, pirronismo e conoscenza storica* (Milan, 1983); and Mouza Raskolnikoff, *Histoire romaine et critique historique dans l'Europe des Lumières: La naissance de l'hypercritique dans l'historiographie de la Rome antique* (Rome, 1992).

5. On the problem of Pyrrhonism and Momigliano, see Ingo Herklotz, "Arnaldo Momigliano's 'Ancient History and the Antiquarian': A Critical Review," and Peter Miller, "Momigliano, Benjamin, and Antiquarianism after the Crisis of Historicism," both in *Momigliano and Antiquarianism: Foundations of the Modern Cultural Sciences*, ed. Peter N. Miller (Toronto, 2007), chaps. 4 and 12. On the close attention paid by Roman antiquaries to the visual arts before the crisis of Pyrrhonism, see Herklotz, *Cassiano Dal Pozzo und die Archäologie des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1999).

6. Since Momigliano, there have been several attempts to bring eighteenth-century antiquarianism and the visual arts together. See Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500–1800*, trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Cambridge, Mass., 1990); and Francis Haskell, *History and Its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven, Conn., 1993), chap. 6. See also T. D. Kaufmann, "Antiquarianism, the History of Objects, and the History of Art before Winckelmann," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (2001): 523–41.

One way to bring them closer together is to look at the problem of forgery in this period. For the Pyrrhonists cited by Momigliano, fake coins and forged documents provided the perfect evidence for their claims about the instability of primary sources. They were also the best vehicles for revealing the credulity of antiquaries. In 1716, Johann Burkhard Mencke, a disciple of Pierre Bayle, recounted how one of the most celebrated antiquaries of his time was duped by a gang of Roman teenagers:

Hearing that a building was to be erected on a certain site, [these youths] resolved to put the ingenuity of Athanasius Kircher to the test. So, they secretly buried there a rough stone on which they had designed some appealing voluptuous figures. When the foundation of the new structure was being dug, the stone was found—and promptly admired as a new monument of antiquity, remarkable for its perfection. At once an interpreter was sought, and Kircher was chosen. As soon as he saw the stone, he began to leap and dance for joy—[and he proceeded to offer] a beautiful interpretation of the circles, the crosses, and all the other meaningless signs.

From this anecdote about the gullibility of Kircher, Mencke readily concludes: “it is the easiest thing in the world to deceive these worshippers of antiquity! . . . Let the tiniest old coin or vase be found covered in mould and rust, and good Lord! What excess of joy is theirs!”<sup>7</sup> Although Mencke clearly had it in for credulous antiquaries, his assessment of Kircher’s easy confidence and active imagination raises questions about the actual relationship between forgery and antiquarianism, especially after the aesthetic turn. If the Pyrrhonist-inspired antiquaries were concerned, above all, with stabilizing the primary sources for their knowledge of ancient history, those antiquaries who focused on the figurative arts—as opposed to inscriptions, charters, and coins—faced a different set of problems.

One problem had to do with the way that antiquaries understood the nature of art itself. As Momigliano put it, “vases, statues, reliefs and gems spoke a much more difficult language.”<sup>8</sup> In 1698, the Roman antiquary Filippo Buonarroti published his *Historical Observations on Some Ancient Medals*, in which he discussed how the focus on objects of different types led to diverse methods among antiquaries. When it came to the figurative monuments of painters and sculptors, Buonarroti threw up his hands: “We will have to judge,” Buonarroti argued, “from a certain knowledge of the faculties of art and honestly admit that we cannot know . . . all that could have come into the head of so many ancient painters and sculptors who have left us monuments of their work.” Buonarroti went on to note that ancient sculptors and painters often deliberately

7. J. B. Mencke, *On the Charlatanry of the Learned* (1716), trans. Francis E. Litz with notes and introduction by H. L. Mencken (New York, 1937), 61–62. I am grateful to Anthony Grafton for this reference.

8. Momigliano, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian,” 304.

changed the symbols and subjects of known fables and gods, or they took their forms from dreams, or they created new forms inspired by the arcane erudition of ancient philosophers and writers. If modern painters' and sculptors' freedom of invention and indulgence in conceits offer no sure knowledge of contemporary historical events or chronology, Buonarroti asked, how can the antiquary draw out a reasonable meaning from the esoteric images of the ancients?<sup>9</sup> Although Buonarroti only meant to contrast the impossible task of interpreting the visual arts with the relatively secure practice of numismatics, he put his finger on what would become a central claim of eighteenth-century antiquarianism. In order to understand ancient painting, gems, vases, and statues, the new antiquary had to see these monuments as the conscious product of artists, not accidental traces of the past.

Aside from the new interpretive difficulties posed by ancient works of art, the rise of an antiquities market to feed Grand Tourists spurred an increasing attention to the problem of separating modern copies from original antiques. In the 1750s, for example, increasing restrictions on the exportation of genuine antiquities prompted a vigilant attention on the part of export agents to the material distinctions between ancient and modern sculpture. Despite the confidence expressed by partisans of the ancients and moderns, collectors and scholars were scarcely able to distinguish an antique marble from a modern copy, let alone a Roman copy of a Greek statue.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the livelihood of Roman restorers depended on the deliberate confusion of these two categories. As the most enterprising and well-connected restorer of marbles in Rome, Bartolomeo Cavaceppi was instrumental in quickening the export trade in hybrid antiquities at midcentury.<sup>11</sup> Before 1750, antique marbles that had been retouched were briefly catalogued in the export licenses as "partly restored." Once Cavaceppi's crossbred objects began their exodus to England, the descriptions of these objects changed dramatically. A typical entry from the exportation lists suggests a new sophistication in merging ancient and modern parts:

August 28, 1752. Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, two white marble busts, one 3 palms high and representing the young Marcus Aurelius; only the head is antique, while the nose is said to be modern; ears were repaired along with the remaining part of the chest; modern feet. An unknown philosopher with antique head: the tip of the nose and ears, and a part of its long hair, have been repaired in the modern fashion.<sup>12</sup>

Twenty years later, at the peak of the antiquities market, the Venetian painter Francesco Casanova wrote a preface to the collection of ancient statues at the Electoral

9. Filippo Buonarroti, *Osservazioni istoriche sopra alcuni medaglioni antichi* (Rome, 1698), ii, iii.

10. P. Sénechel, "Originale e copia: Lo studio comparato delle statue antiche nel pensiero degli antiquari fino al 1770," in *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana*, ed. Salvatore Settis, vol. 3 (Turin, 1984–85).

11. See Seymour Howard, "Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, Eighteenth-Century Restorer" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1958).

12. A. Bertolotti, "Esportazione di oggetti di belle arti da Roma," in *Rivista Europea*, n.s., year 8, vol. 2 (1877): 724.

Academy of Beaux-Arts in Dresden in which he warned his students about the clandestine commerce in fake or restored antiquities. His discourse concerned itself, above all, with the problem of discriminating between the authentic sculpture of antiquity and the falsification stimulated by commerce:

Any educated antiquary would be horrified to stumble into one of these shops and behold the quantity of ancient fragments, heads, busts, torsos, arms, legs, and feet, armor and accessories *of all kinds and from all ages*. The restorers, having attached these pieces to their sculptures, create monuments more mixed than the ancient Pantheon of gods. The poor learned man thus finds himself in a veritable labyrinth when he is obliged to explain these monsters composed of various ancient parts.<sup>13</sup>

For Casanova, the market posed the biggest threat to accurate conceptions of the art of the ancient world as well as to the value of collections like that at the Dresden gallery. Momigliano noted the growing concern of the skeptics with misleading antiquities (that is, the lies told by marble and bronze) in the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> By 1770, antiquities dealers, marble restorers, engravers, and art forgers provided more than enough cause for suspicion without the help of Pierre Bayle.

So, leaving aside Mencke's caricature of the credulous Kircher, what do we really know about the way antiquaries discriminated between real and counterfeit art in the eighteenth century? In his wonderful study of Renaissance and early modern forgery, Anthony Grafton showed how the practice of forgery, beginning in the Hellenistic age, stimulated the development of textual criticism.<sup>15</sup> Forgers not only had to understand the practice of criticism in order to create a plausible narrative of the past; they also had to invent new ways of reading texts in order to fool the critics. Humanists, in turn, sharpened their critical knives on the material provided by forgers. Grafton's study of literary or textual forgeries excluded art forgeries, but the parallels are instructive.

Most of what we know about art forgeries in this period has not come from public exposures. Despite the long tradition of forgery detection by antiquaries and despite the attention to attribution in early modern art connoisseurship, there is simply no equivalent in the study of objects to Lorenzo Valla's *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione* (On the falsely believed and forged donation of Constantine) or Richard Bentley's *Dissertation upon the Epistles of Phalaris*.<sup>16</sup> In the aristocratic world of early modern art collecting, connoisseurs boasted that they could tell an original Rembrandt from a forgery, but those who compiled theoretical or methodological

13. Casanova, *Discorso sopra gli antichi e vari monumenti loro per uso degl'alumni dell'elettoral Accademia delle Bell'Arti di Dresda* (Dresden, 1770), ix. Italics mine.

14. Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," 301.

15. Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (New York, 1990).

16. Although the literature on art forgery is vast, as are studies of the art market, we still lack a theoretically sophisticated history of the symbiosis of connoisseurship and art forgery on a par with Grafton's work. On pre-Enlightenment attitudes to art forgery, however, see Christopher Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago, 2008).

works on painting and prints—whether Abraham Bosse, Roger de Piles, or Jonathan Richardson—did not set out to make forgery the centerpiece of their publication.<sup>17</sup> The possibility of offending an important buyer whose reputation was at stake in the art market would have made such an exposure socially imprudent. In humanist philology, by contrast, controversy was the prime motor for scholarship and exposing a forgery was a great way of displaying one’s superior methods in the face of opposition. Most demonstrations of textual forgeries were thus embedded in a pre-existing dispute, and although forgeries served as the testing ground for philological methods, bringing them to light was often subordinate to a larger ideological purpose.<sup>18</sup>

Aside from the problem posed by the reputation and honor of the buyer, the lowly status of the visual arts also ensured the absence of an intellectual tradition of criticism on par with philology until the late seventeenth century; and without such a tradition, we have no detailed demonstration of art connoisseurship centered around a single false object.<sup>19</sup> What Grafton has called the “axis of continuity” stretching from the Hellenistic age to the nineteenth century has no parallel in the analysis of the visual arts (despite the illusory coherence offered by art encyclopedias). For all of these reasons, it is difficult to look behind Mencke’s satire on learned credulity in order to grasp how eighteenth-century antiquaries actually responded to a forged work of art. Fortunately, there exists a record of one art forgery that was subjected to empirical testing as well as critical analysis almost as soon as it appeared, a forgery that also challenged a different kind of history than the one haunting the Pyrrhonists.

In 1755, a minor and, by some accounts, thoroughly mediocre painter in Rome fooled the king of England, Cardinal Alessandro Albani, several German princes, and many other collectors who considered themselves learned devotees of the antique. Giuseppe Guerra capitalized on the fascination with the wall paintings unearthed at Herculaneum and Pompeii in order to lure a cosmopolitan and aristocratic circle of buyers in Rome into buying the “ancient” Roman frescoes he created in his studio. We do not know when Guerra was born, nor if he came from Naples or Venice.<sup>20</sup> We know something about his technique. We know how he was caught and punished. Yet Guerra himself remains a tantalizing figure since we learn of him only indirectly, and through conflicting accounts.<sup>21</sup> What we do know in some detail, however, is the *response*

17. On connoisseurship and the rise of painting in seventeenth-century France, see Jonathan Brown, *Kings and Connoisseurs: Collecting Art in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (New Haven, Conn., 1995). For England, see Brian Cowan, “An Open Elite: the Peculiarities of Connoisseurship in Early Modern England,” *Modern Intellectual History* 1 (2004): 151–83.

18. Grafton, *Forgers and Critics*, 92–93.

19. On the social status of painters and connoisseurship, see Donald Posner, “Concerning the ‘Mechanical’ Parts of Painting and the Artistic Culture of Seventeenth-Century France,” *Art Bulletin* 75 (1993): 583–98.

20. He is often referred to as Venetian, but Bernardo De Dominici lists a Giuseppe Guerra as a skilled painter and disciple of Solimena in *Vite dei pittori, scultori ed architetti napoletani*, vol. 3 (Naples, 1742), 681.

21. Domenico Bassi, “Altre lettere inedite del P. Antonio Piaggio e spigolature dalle sue Memorie,” *Archivio storico per le province napoletane* 33 (1908): 277–332, esp. 329. Also, Otto Kurz, *Fakes*

to Guerra's forgeries in Naples, Rome, and Paris. According to one Roman contemporary, Guerra and his output disturbed "the entire sect of modern antiquaries."<sup>22</sup>

Between 1755 and 1760, a circle of French art amateurs and antiquaries set out to prove that Guerra's paintings were not ancient. Faced with an object that was both an alleged antiquity and a work of art, the debunkers brought together new methods of analysis and ways of thinking about objects that had been developed separately in the royal academies in Paris. In effect, they applied to art forgery the techniques and ideas of the art connoisseur *and* of the antiquary—a synthesis pioneered three years earlier by the principal investigator of the forgery, the count of Caylus. The unraveling of Guerra's forgery thus tells us about the kind of evidence that had recently become essential to connoisseurs of ancient art. Undertaken at a time when academy artists were trained to imitate the antique and the Grand Tour market in Rome was flooded with copies, restorations, and false antiques, the investigation into Guerra's forgery also reveals the range of attitudes toward forgery itself. Finally, the response to Guerra's fake paintings by those who doubted *and* those who believed shows how deeply the preoccupation with taste and the visual arts informed the historical understanding of antiquity in this period.

### Between Art and Antiquarianism

Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières, the count of Caylus (1693–1765), stood at the center of the Parisian art world at the time of the forgery.<sup>23</sup> For twenty years Caylus served as a *conseiller honoraire amateur* to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, a key institution of the French Enlightenment. The assessment of "high culture" in the eighteenth century owed much to this royal art academy, where an articulate response to works of art—to style, subject matter, and execution—was first and most intensively cultivated by the amateurs who attended the Salon de Paris.<sup>24</sup> Between 1747 and 1759,

(New York, 1945), 74n1. G. Consoli Fiego reconstructed the key events in the forgery of Guerra in 1921, but he stopped short of a full analysis. See G. C. Fiego, "False pitture di Ercolano," *Napoli nobilissima* 2 (1921), 84–88. Other references to Guerra's forgery can be found in the following: Hautecoeur, *Rome et la renaissance de l'antiquité*, 84–85; Carl Justi, *Winckelmann und seine Zeitgenossen*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1923), 3:235–37; M. Praz, *Gusto Neoclassico* (Florence, 1940), 65; F. Zevi, "Gli Scavi di Ercolano," *Civiltà del '700 a Napoli, 1734–1799*, 2 vols. (Naples, 1980), 2:58–68; and Thomas Pelzel, "Winckelmann, Mengs and Casanova: A Reappraisal of a Famous Eighteenth Century Forgery," *Art Bulletin* 54 (1972): 301–15.

22. Bassi, "Altre lettere inedite del P. Antonio Piaggio," 327. Piaggio, as a native Roman, was well positioned to follow the entire episode. He was in charge of interpreting the Herculaneum papyrus scrolls for the Bourbon court. See Franco Strazzullo, *P. Antonio Piaggio e lo svolgimento dei papiri ercolanesi* (Naples, 2002).

23. For a general and early biography, see Samuel Rocheblave, *Essai sur le comte de Caylus* (Paris, 1889). There has been a resurgence of interest in Caylus's work in the past twenty years, beginning with Pomian, "Maffei and Caylus," in *Collectors and Curiosities*, 169–84. See also F. Denis, "Le comte de Caylus et l'Antiquité" (PhD diss., Paris-IV, 1994).

24. On the special role of the amateur in art academies, see Louis Oliver, *Curieux, Amateurs, and Connoisseurs: Laymen and the Fine Arts in the Ancien Regime* (Paris, 1976); Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Paris* (New Haven, Conn., 1987); and Anatole de Montaiglon, *Procès-verbaux de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, 1648–1792*, 10 vols. (Paris, 1875–92).



Caylus gave a series of lectures to students at the Royal Academy in which he addressed the problem of how to talk about art. The lectures covered a range of topics: the figure of the amateur, painting and its relation to sculpture, the qualities of harmony and color, the meaning of “lightness” in oil painting, pictorial composition, and the dangers of artistic affectation.<sup>25</sup> In these lectures, Caylus articulated the aesthetic doctrines that would eventually shape his own antiquarianism.

Throughout these lectures Caylus focused on the training of the artist’s taste and on refining the language for describing art. He also insisted that all contemporary art must take its cue from antiquity. The amateur, he argued, could help the artist develop his own taste, to move from an instinctual and unreflective “slant” to “reasoned admiration.” Caylus defined the *amateur* as one who “knows how to read and think about art.” He also made a distinction between *amateurs* and the *curieux*, that is, collectors who followed the tides of fashion rather than developing a critical taste: “The *curieux* are collectors of paintings who privilege the unique above all and who prefer exclusively one painter, one manner, one school, whether Italy or Flanders.” The “true amateur,” on the other hand, is not bound to the fashions of the auction market, but to the Royal Academy itself: “he is at the service of the *académiciens* and has no prejudices. The academy puts him to good use.”<sup>26</sup>

In 1742, Caylus became a member of another powerful institution in Paris, the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres.<sup>27</sup> The Academy of Inscriptions was originally established by Colbert so that antiquarian erudition would serve the king, not the church, and the first task of its members was to come up with the appropriate iconography for royal medals and tapestries. By 1750, however, the academy, though still tied to the crown, had developed into the leading institution for historical scholarship; it was there that *érudits* like Nicolas Freret and the abbé Banier perfected a method of enlightened criticism that probed ancient literary sources for credible historical evidence about Roman and Greek culture. In their search for social or political explanations underlying ancient myths, the critical *érudits* at the Academy celebrated prosaic and “natural” causes in direct proportion to the fantastic nature of the mythologies and allegories that they unmasked. The Academy of Inscriptions thus became the site for the grand project of filtering out the historical impurities introduced by seventeenth-century European erudition.

Caylus’s membership in these two distinct academies enabled him to act as a kind of intellectual emissary between scholars who examined antiquities for their cor-

25. For these lectures, and Caylus’s reports on the Louvre Salons of 1751 and 1753, see Caylus, *Vies d’artistes du XVIIIe siècle: Discours sur la peinture et la sculpture*, ed. André Fontaine (Paris, 1910).

26. Caylus, “De l’amateur,” in *Vies d’artistes du XVIIIe siècle*, 122, 133, 120. See Cochin’s unflattering portrait of Caylus and his despotic attitude toward artists in *Mémoires inédits de Charles-Nicolas Cochin sur le comte de Caylus, Bouchardon, les Slodtz*, ed. Charles Henry (Paris, 1880).

27. Founded in 1663, the Academy of Inscriptions did not develop into an institute of historical research until the first decade of the eighteenth century. For a history of this academy, see Alfred Maury, *L’ancienne Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (Paris, 1864). On the enormous influence of this academy on both scholarship and historical writing, see Lionel Gossman, *Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment: The World and Work of La Curne Saint-Palaye* (Baltimore, 1968).

respondence to literary sources and modern artists who turned to antiquities in order to achieve the “noble and simple manner of the ‘bel antique.’”<sup>28</sup> Although Diderot claimed that “the eyes of taste are not those of a pensioner at the Academy of Inscriptions,” Caylus forged a vital link between these two institutions and their interests.<sup>29</sup> As a result of this “interdisciplinarity,” Caylus was able to combine the historical erudition practiced at the Academy of Inscriptions with the aesthetic discourse and doctrines cultivated by art amateurs at the Royal Academy of Painting. Nowhere is this synthesis more evident than in Caylus’s illustrated history of ancient art, the *Recueil d’antiquités égyptiennes, grecques, étrusques, et romaines* (1752–65).<sup>30</sup>

Caylus dedicated his *Recueil* to the members of the Academy of Inscriptions, whom he credited for introducing him to the proper study of antiquities: “I regarded the remains of learned antiquity solely from the perspective of art. . . . You have taught me to attach to them an infinitely superior value.”<sup>31</sup> By “an infinitely superior value,” Caylus meant the antiquarian study of objects as evidence for the institutions, religious rituals, customs, and manners of the ancients. Yet Caylus believed that antiquities could also tell a new story if arranged properly—a history of the arts, in fact—and he chastised those who perceived ancient objects solely as “supplement and proofs for [narrative] history—or as isolated texts susceptible to long commentary.”<sup>32</sup> In the pages of his *Recueil*, Caylus dropped the erudite commentaries and instead paid attention to the material make-up of the objects, the techniques of their production, and the conditions of their discovery. He advocated inspecting and analyzing art objects in person (he saw engravings as a poor, but necessary, substitute for the genuine article) and he concentrated on establishing precise connections between the pre-Roman cultures of Egypt, Etruria, and Greece, and ancient Rome through an analysis of the objects themselves. Because Caylus’s technical analyses assumed that the object carried within it the information needed to tell its own history, Alain Schnapp has argued that Caylus’s *Recueil* marks the “emancipation” of antiquarianism from the “dominance” of the textual tradition.<sup>33</sup> Yet Caylus does not fit so easily into the history of how

28. Caylus, “Avertissement,” *Recueil d’antiquités égyptiennes, grecques, étrusques, et romaines*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1752–67), 1:xiii.

29. Diderot, “Notes on Painting to Serve as an Appendix to the Salon of 1765,” in *Diderot on Art*, ed. and trans. John Goodman (New Haven, Conn., 1995), 228.

30. In linking modern art connoisseurship and taste to antiquarian scholarship, Caylus provided Johann Winckelmann with a model for establishing the artistic style of an ancient culture. For a detailed comparison between the two, see Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven, Conn., 1994), 76–81; and Elisabeth Decultot, “Winckelmann et Caylus: Enquête sur les rapports de l’histoire de l’art au savoir antiquaire,” *Le comte de Caylus: Les arts et les lettres*, ed. Nicholas Cronk and Kris Peeters (Amsterdam and New York, 2004), 59–75. Caylus was conscious of the rivalry between himself and Winckelmann, about whom he remarked, “he gets all heated up about the arts without understanding them truly. He flaps his sides to express his pretended enthusiasm and to elevate companions with the nature of the antique”; quoted in Rocheblave, *Essai sur le comte de Caylus*, 133.

31. Caylus, preface to *Recueil d’antiquités*, 1:n.p.

32. Caylus, “Avertissement,” *Recueil d’antiquités*, 1:ii–iii.

33. See Alain Schnapp, “De Montfaucon à Caylus: Le nouvel horizon de l’antiquité,” in *La fascination de l’antique, 1700–1770: Rome découverte, Rome inventée* (Lyon, 1998), 145. For Caylus as part of the

antiquarianism became archaeology. For one thing, all of Caylus's methods and ideas were in service to an *artistic* program grounded in a theory of taste.

Rather than attempting to draw connections between the ancient monuments he had gathered and the literary testimony of the ancients, Caylus warns his reader: "I have often preferred another method, one that perhaps will interest those who love the arts: it consists of studying faithfully the mind and hand of the artist, penetrating to his views, following it in its execution, in a word, regarding these monuments as the proof and expression of the taste that reigned in a particular time and place."<sup>34</sup> What distinguished Caylus's *Recueil* from all previous antiquarian works was precisely this self-conscious championing of ancient monuments as evidence for an aesthetic taste.<sup>35</sup> Schnapp has suggested that Caylus's method allowed him to tell the history of peoples without histories, the Gauls for example; true enough, but only by turning the Gauls into artists.

Since Caylus always had in mind the modern artist who could benefit from an exact knowledge of ancient methods provided by resourceful antiquaries, his antiquarianism was fundamentally different from what had come before.<sup>36</sup> It was the amateur's deep knowledge of the arts that enabled him to detect "the mind and hand of the artist," and Caylus argued that this kind of knowledge—developed first among the connoisseurs—could now assist the antiquary. Caylus's attention to the emotional effect that ancient art had on the spectator also came directly from the world of art, not antiquarianism. In his *Recueil*, Caylus noted that the ancient Egyptians "felt and expressed grandeur, and it is in this that the first and most essential part of art consists, since it alone raises the spirit of the spectator."<sup>37</sup> Even Caylus's attention to the social and anthropological aspects of ancient culture—the core of early modern antiquarianism—was directed to discerning this "characteristic stamp" of a given age and country.<sup>38</sup> For Caylus, there was one further point of contact between

long history of archaeology, see Schnapp, *La conquête du passé: Aux origines de l'archéologie* (Paris, 1993), 238–42 and 140–78.

34. Caylus, "Avertissement," in *Recueil d'antiquités*, 1:vii.

35. Seventeenth-century antiquaries in Rome paid attention to the artistic aspects of antiquities, but without any ideological or programmatic intent. On the antiquarian and artistic researches of the Bellori circle, see the essays by Louis Marchesano, Hetty Joyce, and Ingo Herklotz in *Art History in the Age of Bellori: Scholarship and Cultural Politics in Seventeenth-Century Rome* (Cambridge, 2002).

36. Caylus's future-oriented approach to antiquities, as sources for new art, was dismissed by the *philosophes*, who directed at him the usual critique of antiquaries as hopelessly mired in the ancient past and unaware of the present. On this aspect of Caylus's antiquarianism, see Marc Fumaroli, "Arnaldo Momigliano et la rehabilitation des antiquaires: Le comte de Caylus et le 'retour a l'antique' aux XVIIIe siècle," in *Momigliano and Antiquarianism: Foundations of the Modern Cultural Sciences*, ed. Peter N. Miller (Toronto, 2007), 167ff. See also Fumaroli, "Le comte de Caylus et l'Académie des Inscriptions," *Comptes-rendus des Séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettre*, 139, no. 1 (1995): 227–50.

37. Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquité*, 1:6. On the role of the spectator in these new artistic doctrines, see Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley, Calif., 1980).

38. Caylus and Pierre-Jean Mariette, "Avertissement," *Recueil de peintures antiques trouvées à Rome imitées fidèlement, pour les couleurs et le trait d'après les dessins coloriés par Pietro-Sante Bartoli et autres dessinateurs*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1783–87), 1:1.

the amateur and the antiquary: the aesthetic taste that amateurs develop and the knowledge that antiquaries acquire about ancient history were each grounded in the same process of comparison.<sup>39</sup>

### Putting It to the Test

Caylus's research brought the skills of the antiquary and the art amateur together, but it was the chaotic commercial market of antique dealers and restorers in Rome that provided the surest training ground for this new expertise. Guerra's "ancient" paintings went on the market just as Caylus was gathering material for the third volume of his *Recueil*. In order to gather the necessary antiquities, Caylus relied on an Italian antiquary, Paolo Maria Paciaudi, who set aside his own research in medieval artifacts to serve Caylus's project.<sup>40</sup> Paciaudi was most helpful to Caylus by sending parcels "bien arrangées avec toutes les precautions possibles" to the director of the French academy in Rome, to be forwarded to the marquis de Marigny in Paris, who would then alert Caylus.<sup>41</sup> In return, Caylus sent Paciaudi many books and pamphlets, including the entire collection of the memoirs of the Academy of Inscriptions.

Paciaudi devoted his October afternoons to trekking through the Roman countryside, rummaging around for exceptional antiquities to please Caylus. Defying the local antiquaries in Rome, he gave Caylus the exclusive right to see and engrave all the objects he bought. "I know that the Romans will cry out against me," he wrote, "but I esteem Caylus more than the whole Roman republic."<sup>42</sup> Paciaudi flattered Caylus by repeating the aims of his *Recueil*: "to the knowledge of antiquity you have joined that of the arts," Paciaudi wrote, "usually, those who write about ancient monuments know only the antiquity and their work can be of no use to the artists. You have opened a new route, few *savants* will be capable of following it."<sup>43</sup> Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of Caylus's correspondence with Paciaudi and others on the ground is the way in which he managed to turn them all into far-flung agents in service to the *Recueil*. In their letters to Caylus, and particularly in their analysis of the forgeries, these new disciples made every effort to regard antiquities through the eyes of this powerful amateur.

39. In his 1748 lecture on the amateur, Caylus insisted that taste "draws all its advantages from comparison, and . . . is formed completely by comparison"; "De l'amateur," 122. Five years later Caylus made the same claim for the antiquary: "comparison is to the antiquary what observation and experiment is to the physicist"; "Avertissement," *Recueil d'antiquités*, 1:iii.

40. Scipione Maffei described Paciaudi as "a modern antiquary," a term used for antiquaries who focused on the postclassical world; Maffei to Jacopo Maria Pattoni, May 28, 1750, in Scipione Maffei, *Epistolario (1700–1755)*, ed. Celestino Garibotto, 2 vols. (Milan, 1955), 2:1275. Son of a court physician, Paciaudi studied philosophy, physics, and geometry at Bologna. He was an early advocate of Newton's theories, which were beginning to gain ground in Italy. See Charles Nisard, "Notice sur Paciaudi," in Caylus, *Correspondance inédite du comte de Caylus avec le P. Paciaudi, théatin (1757–1765)*, ed. Nisard, 2 vols. (Paris, 1877), 1:i–ciii.

41. See *Lettres de Paciaudi . . . au comte de Caylus: Avec un appendice, des notes et un essai sur la vie et les écrits de cet antiquaire italien*, ed. Antoine Serieys (Paris, 1802), 1–2, 15. For a list of Paciaudi's finds in 1758, see "Catalogue des antiquités envoyées à M. le Comte de Caylus," in Paciaudi, *Lettres*, 7–14.

42. Paciaudi to Caylus, March 13, 1759, in Paciaudi, *Lettres*, 34.

43. Paciaudi to Caylus, April 29, 1761, *ibid.*, 234.

Another convert to Caylus's program and a key figure in the Guerra forgery was the numismatic scholar Jean-Jacques Barthélemy. Barthélemy represented for many of his contemporaries the model of the new sociable *érudit*. "He's the first medalist in the world who is not a pedant. . . . He talks about the material with charm," wrote Alessandro Verri.<sup>44</sup> The son of a wealthy Provençal merchant, Barthélemy attached himself early to antiquaries at the local academy in Marseilles. He never forgave a Jesuit priest for saying that such academies would ruin religion, and he ultimately gave up his ecclesiastical career in order to pursue the study of antiquities and ancient languages. As a member of the Academy of Inscriptions and as Royal Keeper of the Medals under Louis XV, Barthélemy was at the center of the Parisian society of *érudits*.<sup>45</sup>

In 1755, Barthélemy traveled to Italy in search of ancient coins for Louis XV's collection. He wrote scrupulous letters to Caylus back home describing the frustrations of research ("the errors of those who preceded me make me tremble. . . . When one loves exactitude, one finds almost nothing to say"),<sup>46</sup> but also the joys: "Two days have passed on a piece in the Farnese Palace, full of inscriptions, statues, busts. . . . I was all locked up in my study where I revel and reign."<sup>47</sup> Barthélemy even tried to instruct an impatient Caylus in the perfectionism of hard-won antiquarian scholarship:

There are many errors in most of the books of antiquaries; you reply by telling me that I ought to correct them, but first, you have to know everything which they have written, second, you have to have these works always under your eyes in order to consult them, and third, . . . one must have the time to check the true explanation of a half-effaced inscription or the clothing of a figure already half-destroyed.<sup>48</sup>

In these same letters Barthélemy also adopted the persona of an art lover, evidence of Caylus's growing influence. When examining a set of bronze tripods at Herculaneum, he remarked, "It is not necessary to describe them entirely; but the worker has given them great force and a dreadful expression. Do I use the terms of art?"<sup>49</sup> Upon visiting the Capitoline museum, Barthélemy described his reaction to the first public art museum in wholly modern terms: "the first time I entered, I felt an electric shock."<sup>50</sup> Barthélemy consciously tried to embody the kind of scholar required by Caylus's research. When occupied in copying the inscriptions displayed on the palaces and villas of Rome, he was the selfless antiquary engaged in exhaustive labor; when looking at

44. Verri to Pietro Verri, October 27, 1766, in *Viaggio a Parigi e Londra, 1766–1767*, ed. Gianmarco Gaspari (Milan, 1980), 50–51.

45. On Barthélemy's life and career, see Maurice Badolle, *L'abbé Jean-Jacques Barthélemy et l'Hellénisme en France dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1926). He merits a new biography.

46. Barthélemy to Caylus, January 1, 1756, in Jean-Jacques Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie* (Paris, 1802), 64.

47. Barthélemy to Caylus, February 10, 1756, *ibid.*, 95–96.

48. Barthélemy to Caylus, March 9, 1756, *ibid.*, 113.

49. Barthélemy to Caylus, February 2, 1756, *ibid.*, 85.

50. Barthélemy to Caylus, February 10, 1756, *ibid.*, 95.

the statues in a museum, however, he became a man of taste, capable of feeling an electric shock in the face of great art.

As part of Caylus's inner circle, Barthélemy supplied much of the historical scholarship for Caylus's *Recueil*, particularly regarding the commerce and historical connections between ancient Egypt, Rome, Greece, and Etruria. Through Barthélemy, Caylus learned about the latest Italian scholarship on the Etruscan language, hoping to discover proof that Etruscan art could be traced back to ancient Egypt. Caylus asked his correspondents in Rome to "collect all the gems and scarabs that might show a link to Egypt."<sup>51</sup> Barthélemy reported that a stone ring from the Stosch collection could serve Caylus as evidence of the cultural connection between Egypt and the Etruscans: "It is a cornelian representing a kind of scarab, with a woman's head and hairstyle done in the Egyptian manner; yet it is Etruscan. Here, then, perhaps is better proof of the connection between the Egyptians and the Etruscans."<sup>52</sup>

Barthélemy also looked for evidence for the commerce between Greece and Egypt in the Roman wall paintings he had seen at Herculaneum: "These pieces are very important, not only because they give us details about the religious customs of the Egyptians, but also because they establish the cultural communication between this nation and the inhabitants of Greece."<sup>53</sup> This connection between things Egyptian and Greek, much in vogue at the time, and Roman art was seen not solely as a matter of stylistic influence but also as evidence for shared practices and beliefs. Regarding a set of bas-reliefs showing Egyptian figures, which seemed to have been made in Sardinia, Barthélemy wrote to Caylus: "One need not jump to the conclusion that the inhabitants of Sardinia came from Egypt. Commerce and particular historical circumstances have spread religion and practices more than the transmigration of peoples. One finds in the Herculaneum paintings representations of Egyptian priests occupied in a sacrifice. . . . What's more, Tiberius banished from Rome to Sardegna all those who followed the Egyptian rites."<sup>54</sup> In the fourth volume of his *Recueil*, Caylus made use of Barthélemy's research on the ground: "We notice that after the decline of the great schools of Greece, the so-called Egyptian style spread within Italy and perhaps even in Greece after the conquest of the Romans. The scenery, panoramas, and architecture at Herculaneum offered us further evidence of this fact."<sup>55</sup>

In the winter of 1755, while researching these historical connections between pre-Roman cultures, Barthélemy alerted Caylus to the sale of ancient paintings in Rome:

Do not tell anyone what I am about to tell you. There is a shop selling antique paintings, discovered in ancient Pompeii, which perished almost at the same time as Herculaneum. These paintings are much stronger than those at Herculaneum, all with beautiful colors, graceful drawings and

51. Letter to Paciaudi, November 26, 1759, in Caylus, *Correspondance inédite*, 1:97.

52. Barthélemy to Caylus, November 5, 1755, in Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie*, 34.

53. Barthélemy to Caylus, February 2, 1756, *ibid.*, 80.

54. Barthélemy, "Mémoire sur les anciens monumens de Rome," *ibid.*, 358–59.

55. Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. 4 (1761), 57.

embellishments. Most of them are covered in plaster or some other material which comes off easily. . . . I will try to acquire some for the [king's] cabinet and for you. Tell me what you want, but know that they are very expensive. What is most curious is that in all of them there is an inscription in characters that I have never seen before; it is neither Greek, Latin, Etruscan, nor Punic: I will study them more at my leisure. Do not talk about this, my dear Count.<sup>56</sup>

Barthélemy's initial enthusiasm rested on his expectation that these newly discovered paintings would be *better* than those found at Herculaneum. The ancient paintings uncovered at Herculaneum had become a cause célèbre in France when Charles-Nicolas Cochin, court engraver and member of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, traveled to Italy between 1749 and 1751. Cochin was the first French academician to see the Herculaneum paintings with his own eyes, and in his published report of 1751, he criticized the art of the ancients on the basis of what he saw at Portici. Cochin and others, as partisans of the moderns, denied the ancients any knowledge of linear perspective, chiaroscuro, or the charismatic possibilities of color. Their opponents, in turn, insisted on the superiority of ancient art and they used the same paintings to challenge the moderns' preference for the pictorial aesthetic of the Grand Manner.<sup>57</sup>

Barthélemy knew that Caylus was invested in this artistic debate, but it was the inscriptions that captured his own interest. Caylus must have responded with enthusiasm to Barthélemy's letter, for less than a week later Barthélemy had one of these paintings in hand for 16 *zecchini*: "it is around two and one-half feet high [and] covered in a coating which they took off, leaving a strip along the border for those who are curious to know how they are pulled from the earth."<sup>58</sup> Barthélemy then asked Caylus if he wanted his painting cleaned of its ancient mastic, but by this time, Caylus had seen one of these paintings sent by another buyer, and he was not wholly convinced. Barthélemy's response to Caylus's early warning of the fraud reveals much about the way that such deception could strike at the honor and reputation of amateurs and collectors:

You say that you are very worried about this painting that I bought and you are making arrangements to hide the fact that I have made such an acquisition? Truly I thank you, but I do not see that I have risked my reputation. [If] the picture is judged modern in Paris, they will say that I have bought a painting which all the artists and antiquaries in Rome have judged as antique, and which has since been judged modern in France.

56. Barthélemy to Caylus, November 5, 1755, in Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie*, 33.

57. For the first time, ancient paintings were used as evidence in the cultural debate between ancients and moderns. On Cochin and the reprisal of this quarrel, see Christian Michel, "Les peintures d'Herculanum et la querelle des anciens et des modernes (1740–1760)," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français* (1984): 105–17.

58. Barthélemy to Caylus, November 11, 1755, in Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie*, 40.

I do not see the harm that this division of opinion could do to me. I assure you, my dear Countcomte, that I will place nothing in the king's cabinet that would embarrass me. I have taken great care in my particular commissions for which I am charged, but if I am tricked, I will be the first to admit it and the fault will be all mine.<sup>59</sup>

When serving as agents for royal collections, antiquaries like Barthélemy had to be careful in their judgments and their purchases, but Barthélemy refused to believe his individual reputation was at stake given that his purchases were endorsed by distinguished authorities (“all the artists and antiquaries in Rome”). Barthélemy himself never claimed any expertise in connoisseurship and he had nothing to lose in purchasing a forged painting. Moreover, he implies, if the revelation of his purchase sets off a competition between authorities in Rome and those in Paris, then Paris wins.

Contuccio Contucci, the prefect of the museum at the Jesuit College in Rome, was one of these distinguished authorities. Contucci played a critical role in promoting the “ancient” paintings of Guerra to buyers in Rome.<sup>60</sup> When visiting the Jesuit collection, Barthélemy discovered a room full of paintings all purchased from the same place as his own piece. He zeroed in on a copperplate inscription embellished with a green patina and fixed onto a stone fragment: “The letters are made out of small sheets or fillets of copper adorned with a modern green patina. They set them in a bed of plaster on top of stone. . . . They would have us believe that this stone had been detached from a wall; and in order to persuade us, they placed on top of the plaster some of that famous tartar. The imposture leaps to your eyes.” Barthélemy’s knowledge of inscriptions—and how they were supposed to look—was the antiquary’s domain. According to Barthélemy, Contucci used this inscription to shore up the authenticity of the paintings since identical inscriptions were found in all of them. “Contucci himself would have been the first to realize [the deceit],” Barthélemy wrote, “if he had been informed, but the desire to preserve an air of authenticity for the twenty or thirty paintings that he has assembled has seduced him.”<sup>61</sup> Barthélemy’s ascription of confirmation bias to Contucci was charitable compared to those who already suspected the Jesuit of being a co-conspirator (a point to which I will return).

In making his purchase, Barthélemy had relied on the services of another French buyer, the geographer and explorer Charles de La Condamine (1701–1771). La Condamine was a member of the Royal Academy of Science in Paris. Roger Hahn has shown

59. Barthélemy to Caylus, January 1, 1756, *ibid.*, 62.

60. F. R. de Angelis, “Contucci, Contuccio,” in *Dizionario Biografica degli Italiani*, vol. 28 (Rome, 1968), 559. Contucci held a chair in rhetoric at the Jesuit College and was a member of the new papal academy of Roman history and antiquities founded by Benedict XIV.

61. Barthélemy to Caylus, February 25, 1756, in Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie*, 111. On the epigraphic tradition that informed Barthélemy’s own research, see Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity* (Oxford, 1988); Erna Mandowsky and Charles Mitchell, *Pirro Ligorio’s Roman Antiquities* (London, 1963); and William McCuaig, “The Fasti Capitolini and the Study of Roman Chronology in the Sixteenth Century,” *Athenaeum* 79 (1991): 141–59.



how the Academy of Sciences crafted the modern scientific persona through the exclusion of those who were either enthusiasts of a particular doctrine (Jesuits, Cartesians) or enthusiasts of every doctrine (dilettantes). Artisans, on the grounds that they were uneducated, were not acceptable candidates for membership. La Condamine resisted this latter exclusion. He was an early member of the little-known art club, the Société des arts, which attempted to break down the barriers between arts and sciences erected by the Royal Academy.<sup>62</sup> The Société des arts sought to merge the talents and knowledge of painters, clockmakers, engineers, and architects. Caylus and La Condamine thus shared an empirical interest in the arts. La Condamine, who had helped Barthélemy buy Guerra's forgeries a few months earlier, was even more candid in referring his acquisitions to the influence of artists:

All the painters in Rome to whom [Contucci] showed these pictures did not hesitate to judge them antique. The Cardinal Albani bought one, the king of England, the margravine bought two for which she paid very dear. . . . The baron von Gleichen, her equerry, and a great amateur and demi-connoisseur, also bought two—all with a great air of mystery and under the eyes and direction of Mengs, the Saxon painter. So you see, I let myself be dragged into it with complete docility. . . . Not daring to weigh doubts founded on simple probabilities against the testimonies of connoisseurs who would all be deceived if I was right, I was forced to yield to the torrent.<sup>63</sup>

While La Condamine claimed to have relied on the judgment provided by connoisseurs and artists, in the same letter to Caylus, he gave a full account of the technical details of the paintings that had made him a believer. In doing so, he revealed himself to be a keen student of artistic technique. La Condamine questioned the vibrancy of the color, the sheer quantity of the paintings in circulation, the consistency of the style, and the baffling inscriptions, but he singled out the coating as proof of its antiquity:

I did recognize *what you call* the modern manner [le faire moderne], and above all, I was struck by the jerky brushstrokes à la Rembrandt which produce thick heavy elevations, particularly in the folds of the drapery. . . . I was at least tempted to believe that the antique had been restored by a modern painter. Yet I saw everywhere, with a magnifying glass, the remnants of some tartar or dark grime in the grooves and furrows left behind by the trace of the brush hairs. And that's what led me to deceive myself.<sup>64</sup>

62. The Société des arts, rediscovered by Franco Venturi, was patronized by the count of Clermont, later the grand master of the French freemasons. It was reincarnated as the Société libre d'émulation de Paris in 1777. See Roger Hahn, *Anatomy of a Scientific Tradition: The Paris Academy of Sciences, 1666–1803* (Berkeley, Calif., 1971), 108–11. See also Robert Shackleton, "The Enlightenment and the Artisan," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 190 (1980): 53–62.

63. La Condamine to Caylus, February 17, 1756, in Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie*, 100.

64. *Ibid.*

La Condamine's analysis of the brushstroke and the use of a magnifying lens to examine the grooves of the brush hairs were already established methods in French art connoisseurship, but La Condamine—guided by Caylus—used these techniques to identify *le faire moderne* rather than the hand of an individual artist, the traditional focus of attribution.<sup>65</sup> When Caylus claimed in his *Recueil* that he intended to “[study] faithfully the mind and hand of the artist,” he envisioned the artist as a representative of a whole culture. In regarding the individual artwork as evidence for a historical and collective taste, Caylus followed both the new cultural histories of the Enlightenment, which traced the historical development of the human mind, and the older practices of the antiquaries, who believed that the entirety of an ancient culture could be resurrected from the objects left behind. In a curious inversion, La Condamine here adopts Rembrandt, the paradigmatic individual artist, as a kind of stand-in for the collective style of *modern painting*.<sup>66</sup>

The tartar, which La Condamine later identified as an ash and sand paste pressed into the panel with brush hairs, convinced him that he was dealing with an ancient object primarily because it remained invisible to the naked eye. La Condamine's trained bias toward the truth of invisible things outweighed the other indications of modern handiwork. To be fair, no one before Guerra had thought to use a chemical tartar to fool buyers of antique painting, although a similar technique of aging had been used in falsifying coins.<sup>67</sup> Guerra must have been a fairly clever dealer. Not only did he go out of his way to mimic a chemical residue that would be expected on ancient paintings pulled from the ground, but he also charged his customers 5 *zecchini* extra to clean it off.

Like Caylus, La Condamine was fascinated by the undisclosed methods of artists and artisans. Crippled by a curiosity that led to all sorts of indiscretions, this French scientist had already made a habit of insinuating himself into esoteric ceremonies, like those of the Paris *convulsionnaires* whose mysteries La Condamine swore to protect in order to gain admittance to their houses.<sup>68</sup> La Condamine managed to gain access to Guerra's workshop, and he described his encounter with the painter, who at that time pretended to be merely the cleaner:

65. Posner, “Concerning the ‘Mechanical’ Parts of Painting,” 583–98. On the significance of the magnifying glass in British satires of connoisseurs, see Harry Mount, “The Monkey with the Magnifying Glass: Constructions of the Connoisseur in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *Oxford Art Journal* 29, no. 2 (2006): 167–84.

66. La Condamine knew that Caylus was in the process of making six engravings after Rembrandt, published in Amsterdam the following year. See Caylus, *Histoire de Joseph . . . gravées sur les modèles du fameux Reimbrandt par Monsieur le comte de Caylus* (Amsterdam, 1757).

67. Antonio Cocchi, *primo antiquario della Galleria Fiorentina: 1738–1758*, ed. Miriam Fileti Mazza and Bruna Tomasello (Modena, 1996), x. Thomas Jenkins went to less effort, pouring tobacco juice on marbles to mimic an antique patina. See Adolf Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, trans. C. A. M. Fennell (Cambridge, 1882), 77; and Winckelmann's later description of a false gem designed for Alessandro Albani, in *Description des pierres gravées du feu baron de Stosch* (Florence, 1760), 134.

68. Charles-Henri, baron de Gleichen, *Souvenirs du baron de Gleichen* (Paris, 1868), 178–86. See also Pierre M. Conlon, “La Condamine the Inquisitive,” *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 55 (1967): 361–93.

He spoke to me very mysteriously at first. Then he all but admitted that he himself had done it, by heating [the paintings] little by little, until the grey tartar took on a reddish color like that of powdered brick or cracked earthen pots. He did the preparation by himself and I was witness to the entire operation, which consisted in spreading a watery sponge over the dried tartar. The whole thing comes off like ash and the water has a red tinge. He said that a peasant transports them one by one without knowing what he is carrying.

Upon spying one of the paintings still encrusted and disjoined at several points along the border, La Condamine asked Guerra, “How will you deal with that problem? The paint will come off in the cleaning.” According to La Condamine, Guerra was eager to show off his method, telling him, “when the painting is heated, I flatten the color against the frame by pressing my finger like this (making a demonstration of it for me), and it attaches itself to the background: you will see tomorrow.”<sup>69</sup>

Sure enough, when La Condamine returned the following day and observed the vigorous cleaning operation, he saw that the paint adhered to the frame. La Condamine’s precise words—“j’ai été témoin ensuite de l’opération” (“I then witnessed the operation”)—evoke the earlier scientific practice of “witnessing” in which noble patrons observed and thereby legitimated a new experiment or instrument.<sup>70</sup> The early proposals for the Paris Academy of Sciences advocated such visual demonstration, and in La Condamine’s account, Guerra—the artisan—appears as the creator of an inventive technique. Anxious to determine the actual material of the paintings, La Condamine then turned to Caylus for assistance. He urged Caylus to try soap, urine, and water to test whether or not the painting was oil-based. La Condamine assured Caylus that only he could do the necessary experiments: “You are the only one I know who is able to prove a forgery that has seduced the most able men in our country. . . . I can’t see anyone else who combines the necessary and diverse knowledge that can decide the question.”<sup>71</sup>

Caylus had earned this reputation through his many dissertations on ancient artistic techniques, presented before the Academy of Inscriptions over the course of twenty years. Indeed, Caylus had only a few months earlier made public his investigation into a lost method of painting mentioned by Pliny and practiced by Greek artists in Egypt in the second century. For this work, Caylus collaborated with a doctor of medicine at the University of Paris who understood chemistry, which Caylus believed to be “the guiding light for almost all the arts.”<sup>72</sup> Caylus presented his *Memoir on Painting in Encaustic* to the *érudits* at the Academy of Inscriptions, whom Caylus believed

69. La Condamine to Caylus, February 17, 1756, in Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie*, 103.

70. Thomas L. Hankins and Robert J. Silverman, *Instruments and the Imagination* (Princeton, N.J., 1995), 23.

71. Condamine to Caylus, in Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie*, 107.

72. Caylus, *Mémoire sur la peinture à l’encaustique et sur la peinture à la cire par M. le comte de Caylus de l’Académie des belles-lettres* (Geneva, 1755), 8.

would be interested in an experiment that not only revealed a lost ancient technology but also clarified an obscure passage in Pliny.<sup>73</sup> The form of the treatise is highly technical, but Caylus explained that such details are necessary when describing an artistic technique “in order to give artists the means of practicing it without any other aid. The experiments, he explained, “take a long time to complete and even longer to simplify; ordinarily they require more than one repetition; these same experiments often open up new routes, which one cannot avoid pursuing further.”<sup>74</sup>

Two years after Barthélemy first alerted him to the sale of Guerra’s paintings, Caylus finally completed his experiments on a sample sent to him in Paris and, although he also found the design, manner, and colors suspicious, he considered the presence of oil as the definitive proof of artistic forgery: “What I have seen has fully confirmed it, that is, the material on which the painting is applied, the design, the manner, and to cap it all, the oil, which I had tested, all these have convinced me.”<sup>75</sup> Moreover, in the same year, Caylus had the chance to compare the images done of Guerra’s paintings with a set of watercolor images made of the Nasoni tombs in Rome by Pietro Bartoli. The Bartoli images served as additional proof: “the color tone and harmony of the ancient painting differs absolutely from what was shown to me.” By examining the artistic technologies at work in Guerra’s painting, Caylus and La Condamine offered an empirical definition of what constitutes a “modern” painting. In doing so, they proved that the forged paintings—like the antiquities in Caylus’s own *Recueil*—carried all the information needed to reveal their origins.

Focusing on the material composition was not, however, the only method for proving that Guerra’s paintings were modern. The belief in a singularity of artistic style also shaped the judgments both for and against Guerra. Even after the imposture had been exposed in print, several buyers of Guerra’s paintings, possibly in order to protect the value of their own purchases, argued that there was a perceptible difference between Guerra’s modern paintings on canvas, which were done badly, and the ancient frescoes he was selling. “They say,” Paciaudi reported to Caylus, “that all painters have their own style [manières naturelle] which they maintain in all their works; but we find nothing of this in the paintings that Guerra offers to the world, and so the paintings in *fresco* cannot be his composition.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, Guerra could not have helped but reveal himself in both sets of paintings. Paciaudi suggested that Guerra might have consciously worked in two distinct styles and that he had made his own “modern” paintings inferior to the “ancient” in order to fool his clients. The feigned mediocrity of Guerra’s own canvas paintings thus persuaded his buyers that the same hand could not have achieved the grace and naturalism that they had found in the mural frescoes. Other buyers (including La Condamine) noted that the so-called ancient paintings looked too much alike to be genuine antiques, suggesting that Guerra could not, in

73. Caylus, *ibid.*, preface.

74. Caylus, *ibid.*, 7, 3.

75. Caylus to Paciaudi, February 7, 1757, in Caylus, *Correspondance inédite*, 1:2–3.

76. Paciaudi to Caylus, September 2, 1760, *ibid.*, 1:209.

fact, disguise his individual style from making itself manifest in the forged paintings. Paciaudi even thought that he could recognize Guerra's composition in the ancient paintings.

Carlo Ginzburg has called attention to the seventeenth-century physician Giulio Mancini, who attempted to identify and date individual paintings based on a parallel concept of uniqueness in handwriting analysis. This little-known doctor emphasized that it was the involuntary details in the paintings that marked the individual style—exactly the method later established by Morelli as a professional rule of connoisseurs in the nineteenth century.<sup>77</sup> This search for involuntary details seems to have informed the buyers' response to the doubts surrounding Guerra's paintings, and it reflects a highly sophisticated and novel approach to ancient art.

There was, however, yet another method that antiquaries perfected and that Caylus hoped artists would follow: tracing literary sources. At the same time that Caylus was learning about the forgery, he was completing a treatise on Virgil and Homer that would eventually send both Diderot and Lessing into apoplectic fits of rebuttal. Caylus's *Paintings taken from the Iliad, Odyssey, and the Aeneid* (1757) was intended as a suitable quarry for modern artists; in his view, the epic poems were worthy sites to be mined by painters who needed mythological and historical materials to achieve the grandeur of the ancients. Paintings drawn from ancient poetry, Caylus argued, would also increase knowledge of the various subjects that had remained obscure to both artists and antiquaries. In proposing one tableau taken from a passage in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Caylus makes it clear that art takes priority over literary criticism: "I don't know why Jupiter orders Mercury to wrap himself in the winds in order to carry his orders to Aeneas. That's Virgil's concern. He doesn't give any explanation for it . . . [but] it's enough for me that this idea produces a beautiful composition."<sup>78</sup>

When it came to identifying the subject matter of Guerra's paintings, Caylus's circle assumed that Guerra devised his paintings the same way, that is, he pulled his subjects from the existing ancient literature and created illustrations. La Condamine managed to identify one passage for the very painting he had watched Guerra press his agile fingers into at his workshop. In his letter to Caylus, La Condamine described the painted scene in generic terms: "It is a very large painting, representing a man seated on a carpet between three nude women who are dousing him with perfume. There are some scent-boxes and gold vases. A young crowned man walks toward him and seems to speak. A sword hanging by a string from the ceiling reaches to the head of the man." La Condamine then tracked the various visual clues in the painting to a literary source and he triumphantly cited the very line that gave the painting away: "It's the *districtus*

77. Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, 1989), 96–126. Donald Posner notes that Abraham Bosse's *Sentiments sur la distinction des diverses manières des peinture* (1649) was much better known than Mancini's manuscript; "Concerning the 'Mechanical' Parts of Painting," 591n72.

78. Caylus, *Tableaux tirés de l'Iliade, de l'Odyssée d'Homere, et de l'Eneide de Virgile* (Paris, 1757), xxxix, 323.

*ensis cui super impia cervice pendet* from Horace, which is to say, Damocles in the court of Dionysius.”<sup>79</sup> Where else would Guerra get his ideas?

Barthélemy had noted in one of his letters that it was precisely the obscurity of the subject matter in Guerra’s paintings that had led other antiquaries astray. “I examined the paintings once more,” he wrote to Caylus, “the author of the imposture searched for unique events in Herodotus, Titus-Livy, and in other historians; the antiquaries in Rome, taken in at first, looked for the source of the puzzle, and then congratulated themselves for having found it.”<sup>80</sup> If Guerra did indeed go out of his way to distract the onlooker from questions of style by choosing subjects that could not be compared with existing representations, he failed to anticipate the historical scholarship practiced by *érudits* at the Academy of Inscriptions. Barthélemy brought all the weight of his knowledge to bear on Guerra’s paintings, and unlike La Condamine and Caylus, he examined them primarily as documents of ancient history. One of Guerra’s paintings, he reported, depicted Greek as well as Persian subjects mixed together. Barthélemy—like many others at the time—assumed that the ancient painters working at Herculaneum were themselves Greek, or at least deeply informed about Greek mythology and art, but he was puzzled by the inclusion of Persian themes. “What rapport,” he asked, “existed between the inhabitants of Herculaneum and those of Persia?”<sup>81</sup>

Finally, the idealization of antiquity that later drove philhellenism provided further evidence of Guerra’s modernity. At one point La Condamine tried to explain why these paintings could only be modern: “I have noticed that in this painting and in others that the feet look like they have been shod since the big toe is turned inward like those of modern feet which are constrained and disfigured by shoes. This does not happen in pure nature (*la pure nature*), nor in the antique.”<sup>82</sup> The lovely detail of the inward-turning toe betrays the aesthetic presumptions underlying La Condamine’s idea of antiquity. Shoes were a constraint of culture, a custom that nature-loving ancients would never have accepted. In La Condamine’s analysis, then, the new idealized understanding of antiquity converged with the historical empiricism of the scholar. Caylus must have approved of such revealing details. In a 1747 lecture to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, he had remarked on the public visibility of the nude body in ancient Greece, particularly among slaves, artisans, athletes, and gymnasts; Greek nudity and their intimacy with the natural world, he argued, indelibly shaped their own art.<sup>83</sup>

79. La Condamine to Caylus, February 17, 1756, in Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie*, 108. See Horace, *Odes* 3.1.17: “When over whose impious head the unsheathed sword hangs . . .”

80. Barthélemy to Caylus, February 10, 1756, in Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie*, 93.

81. *Ibid.*

82. La Condamine to Caylus, February 17, 1756, *ibid.*, 108.

83. See Caylus, “Sur la manière et les moyens de l’éviter,” September 2, 1747, in *Vies d’artistes du XVIIIe siècle*, 177.

### Winckelmann Weighs In

Johann Winckelmann also believed that nude, open-air calisthenics was essential to the formation of the ideal Greek beauty, an ideal that, in turn, manifested itself in Greek art. In his “Instructions for the Connoisseur,” published the same year that Guerra began selling his paintings, Winckelmann insisted that “workmanship is not the standard that distinguishes the ancient from the modern.” For Winckelmann, in contrast with Caylus, connoisseurship did not involve technical analysis; it was the science of discerning “ideal beauties, brain born images”—a phrase he borrowed from Plato’s *Timaeus*.<sup>84</sup> When Winckelmann had his own chance to examine Guerra’s paintings, long after Caylus had proven the work to be a forgery, he wrongly accused Caylus of having fallen for the fraud and asserted that his own methods of analysis could have exposed it. In a letter to the Graf von Brühl, which Winckelmann published in German in 1762, he unwittingly affirmed the ideas of the French academicians when he insisted that detecting such a forgery required the skills of the art connoisseur *and* scholar: “Men of taste, instructed in art and versed in antiquities, will recognize the fraud easily.”<sup>85</sup>

Unlike Caylus and his correspondents, Winckelmann was not interested in Guerra’s ability to imitate the materials or techniques of ancient art. Instead, he assumed an intellectual opposition between forger and critic. Guerra, in his opinion, was entirely *unversed* in antiquities:

The painter has not demonstrated the least knowledge of the customs, dress, or manners of the ancients. One perceives immediately that he has composed his pictures in ignorance and that he has pulled everything out of his head. [Guerra] creates a completely new world as if blind. . . . Let’s put it this way: if even one of the pictures had been antique, the entire system of knowledge [das ganze Systema der Kentnisse] about Antiquity would have been toppled.<sup>86</sup>

Winckelmann was the first to state that the forgeries represented a potential threat to the historical knowledge of ancient art, and he identified the anachronistic details of Guerra’s paintings:

84. Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Paintings and Sculptures of the Greeks*, trans. Henry Fuseli (London, 1765), 252, 4.

85. Winckelmann, *Sendschreiben von den Herculanischen Entdeckungen: An den Hochgebohrnen Herrn Heinrich Reichsgrafen von Brühl* (Dresden, 1762), 31. Winckelmann’s polemical letter was not intended to be read outside German circles, but thanks to Caylus, it was translated into French and published in 1764. The publisher of the translation made it clear, however, that the French art amateurs were not going to give the German author the last word: “certain people equally versed in the arts and in the knowledge of the science of antiquity took the trouble to oversee the translation and to correct the style of the original so as to make it merely intelligible; and they added certain remarks in the form of notes.” One of these footnotes was a direct rebuttal to Winckelmann’s claim that Caylus had been duped by Guerra: “far from being deceived,” the note read, “[Caylus] was perhaps the first to speak of this imposture”; *Lettre de M. l’abbé Winckelmann, antiquaire de Sa Sainteté a monsieur le comte de Brühl, chambellan du roi de Pologne, electeur de Saxe, sur les découvertes d’Herculanum* (Paris, 1764), “avis de la imprimeur” (n.p.) and 32. Italics mine.

86. Winckelmann, *Sendschreiben von den Herculanischen Entdeckungen*, 32.

Among the Jesuits' paintings, there is one of Epaminondas as he is carried away after the battle of Mantinea, and Guerra has painted this hero with an armor of complete iron, which soldiers of the Middle Ages used to wear in the tournaments. In another painting one sees a combat of animals represented in an amphitheater; the praetor or emperor who presides is seen with his arm resting on the hilt of a drawn sword—just like those used during the Thirty Years' War.<sup>87</sup>

When Winckelmann touched briefly on Guerra's own manner of painting, he called attention to his "concept of beauty" (Begriffe der Schönheit) as restricted to "mediocre [mäßige] stretched out [lang gezogen] figures," artistic features that Winckelmann considered highly unclassical.<sup>88</sup> Winckelmann's judgment of Guerra's paintings was based on his historical understanding of ancient taste and culture (the "customs, dress, or manners of the ancients"), but his analysis obviously benefited from *knowing in advance* that they were forgeries.<sup>89</sup> Both Barthelemy and La Condamine were initially seduced by the judgment of others and by what they saw in the paintings, which meant that their analysis of the forgeries began with a different question: What led me to be deceived? Reconstructing the misleading sources of their own beliefs seems to have led these art amateurs to make use of a wider range of evidence than Winckelmann, who never had to ask such a question in the first place.

### Copy as Crime

The Bourbon authorities—charged with protecting the royal collection—did not regard Guerra's forgery as an opportunity to test their antiquarian or artistic expertise, but their response to the forgery also involved an unusual method of proof. In the spring of 1758, Bernardo Tanucci, then Charles's prime minister in Naples, ordered the duke of Cerisano, the Bourbon ambassador at the Farnese Palace in Rome, to find out who was selling these paintings. Cerisano found Guerra easily enough and bought three paintings (a bacchanalia, a marriage ceremony, and a depiction of Jove on a globe with lightning in hand), which Guerra claimed to have been discovered in an ancient cave, somewhere in the Roman countryside.<sup>90</sup>

The Bourbon court ordered Cerisano and a Neapolitan lawyer, Centomani, to arrest Guerra. The cardinal secretary of state in Rome, Cardinal Archinto, prevented the arrest and allowed Cerisano only to interrogate Guerra, who ultimately confessed to the forgery and agreed to copy a genuine ancient painting from the Bourbon collection to prove it. As a model for imitation, the Bourbon court sent an engraved copy of

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.*

89. Indeed, Winckelmann's dangerous reliance on his own authority and taste meant that he was ripe for a fall—and he later became the victim of a forgery crafted to embody all the elements of his aesthetic theory. See Steffi Roettgen, "Storia di un falso: Il Ganimede di Mengs," *Arte Illustrata* 6 (1973): 256–70. Thomas Pelzel, "Winckelmann, Mengs, and Casanova: A Reappraisal of a Famous Eighteenth Century Forgery," *Art Bulletin* 54 (1972), 301–15.

90. Paciaudi to Caylus, September 2, 1760, in Caylus, *Correspondance inédite*, 1:208.



an ancient painting, *Chiron with Achilles*, which had been discovered in the Basilica of Herculaneum. They also demanded that Guerra hand over the three paintings that he had for sale.<sup>91</sup> In a letter dated February 14, 1758, we learn that Cardinal Archinto made the three forged paintings available to Cerisano, but on one condition. The paintings had to be “hidden from public view so that they would not cause damage to Guerra himself, who relies on painting to make a living.”<sup>92</sup>

The Bourbon court dramatically defied this order. In 1760, the first official account of the Guerra scandal appeared in the second volume of the *Antichità di Ercolano*, produced by the Academy of Herculaneum, which had been instituted by Charles III and Tanucci in order to analyze the authentic antiquities and publish its findings. The Bourbon academy did not reproduce Guerra’s paintings in the pages of the *Antichità di Ercolano*, but the preface to that volume reported that Guerra’s three paintings had been hung in the royal museum right next to the ancient paintings from Herculaneum, so that “they [themselves] declared the truth before everyone’s eyes.” Guerra’s coerced copy of the famous *Chiron with Achilles* was also on display in the museum next to the original, exposed to the public, along with Guerra’s name and an attached story of the affair.

What’s remarkable about the Bourbon response is the *display* of the false and genuine paintings side by side in the museum, a tactic that they obviously considered a form of proof rather than simply a means to humiliate the forger. By comparing Guerra’s copy of the genuine *Chiron with Achilles* with the original *and* alongside his three false paintings, the public had to agree that “there remained no doubt of the newness of the . . . paintings, whose antiquity they had been proclaiming before.”<sup>93</sup> The museum’s display of the true and the false paintings was, in one sense, an ironic reversal of those great public ceremonies of legitimization found in histories of both ancient and Renaissance art. Instead of championing the unique style or superiority of Apelles or Brunelleschi in approved contests, the Bourbons commissioned a forgery and relied on a public comparison to underscore the distinction between ancient and modern, original and copy. The preface concluded with these words of warning:

91. Here I must rely on Fiego’s description of these documents in 1921. Once preserved in the Affari Esteri files at the Archivio di Stato in Naples, the archival documents consulted by Fiego were destroyed by German bombing in 1944; Fiego, “False pitture di Ercolano,” 84–88. According to Paciaudi, Cerisano had already sent these three paintings to Naples but refused to pay Guerra until he confessed. Paciaudi also mentioned that Cerisano deposited a large sum in a public bank to pay the artist if he wished to own up to the forgery, but that Guerra still refused to acknowledge his role and the money remained in deposit. The original diplomatic records, as described by Fiego, do not support Paciaudi’s version of events.

92. Fiego, “False pitture di Ercolano,” 87. Archinto’s restriction is evidence of the extraordinary protection for the working artist in Rome. In fact, by 1750, artists in Rome enjoyed a freedom unparalleled in other cities of Europe. In particular, the freedom of local artists to conduct business irrespective of their membership in the Accademia di San Luca was quite unlike the “rigid academic dictatorship” in Paris. See Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present* (Cambridge, 1940; reprint, New York, 1973), 112–13.

93. *Le antichità di Ercolano esposte*, vol. 2 (Naples, 1760), preface.

We know that the industrious Guerra is a good painter. We regret that we have had to report this incident, and we wish, for his sake, that he will strive to acquire as an author [in autore] that money and esteem, which he cannot have as a copyist [in copista]. Meanwhile, everyone is obliged to contest when he hears others boasting about paintings taken from the excavations at Herculaneum. We will carry on with the publication of the true paintings, since the appetite does not allow itself to be satiated on false ones.”<sup>94</sup>

In the eyes of the Bourbon academy, Guerra was a copyist—that is, a professional imitator of ancient paintings rather than a creator of his own inventions.<sup>95</sup> The Bourbon court wanted to possess both the objects excavated and the engraved copies of them; thus the final warning about his false paintings confirms that such copies were seen not as threats to a historical knowledge of ancient art, as Winckelmann had feared, but merely as the appropriation of dynastic property.

### ☞ The Less Deceived?

The members of the Bourbon academy, like Winckelmann, knew in advance that the paintings were not genuine antiquities. Guerra had already confessed. Perhaps the academy members did not see any need to offer a rationale or critical method for proving the forgery because they assumed the imposture was obvious at first glance. While Winckelmann and the Bourbon scholars disagreed about who was in a position to judge these paintings (for Winckelmann, only men of taste; for the Bourbon academicians, anyone looking at the paintings on display in the museum), both assumed that the forgery was easily recognized at first glance. If the development of new critical methods in scholarship depended, in part, on the practice of forgery, as Grafton has argued, the forger had at least to succeed.

And succeed he did. Mencke’s satire on gullible antiquaries mocked their uncritical deference to antiquity (“it is the easiest thing in the world to deceive these worshippers of antiquity! . . . What excess of joy is theirs!”), but at a time when hundreds of never-before-seen antiquities were being pulled from the buried cities of Campania, a willing suspension of disbelief was not entirely irrational. Barthélemy and La Condamine, as I mentioned, were initially persuaded, but of all the buyers, Contuccio Contucci at the Collegio Romano was the most devoted to these ancient finds, and his willingness to believe often confused other buyers and scholars who thought he must have imbibed the spirit of that other Jesuit, Athanasius Kircher.

In a lavishly illustrated three-volume edition of Virgil published between 1763 and 1765, Antonio Ambrogi, a Florentine Jesuit at the Roman College, reproduced five paintings by Guerra held in Contucci’s collection. Ambrogi was responsible for

94. Ibid.

95. On the attitude toward copies, see Rudolf Wittkower, “Imitation, Eclecticism, and Genius,” in *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Earl R. Wasserman (Baltimore, 1965), 152–53.

the translations and the scholarly commentary. For the copperplate engravings, he sought the most up-to-date antiquarian sources to illustrate his Virgil. Aside from the “ancient” paintings of Guerra, he reproduced images from Montfaucon’s *Antiquité expliquée* (1719–24), Winckelmann’s 1760 publication of baron von Stosch’s ancient gems, and the late-antique Vatican miniatures copied by Pietro Santi Bartoli in 1725.<sup>96</sup> Ambrogi was diligent in acknowledging his sources because he wanted the Virgil edition to appeal to a certain kind of reader, promising that “you will find an exact list of these illustrations in my preface, which tells you where they were taken from. I have nothing else to add, except that we have enriched our work with such monuments for the sake of scholars of antiquity.”<sup>97</sup>

Ambrogi treated each of Guerra’s paintings as felicitous evidence for the heroic worlds evoked in the *Aeneid* and in the pastoral landscapes of the *Georgics* and *Bucolics*, and he called attention to the historical significance of the images for contemporary antiquaries: “Since [the paintings] are certainly very ancient, they give an idea of the clothes, weapons, rites, sacrifices, and all those things that learned men study in this field of knowledge.”<sup>98</sup> Several of Guerra’s paintings illustrated passages in the *Aeneid* that had not been represented in either of the Vatican manuscripts. One image in Ambrogi’s edition shows Helen of Troy seeking refuge behind the altar of Minerva while another represents Aeneas fleeing the burning city of Troy with his father, Anchises, and his son, Iulus, both incidents described by Aeneas in Book II. Another shows the figure of Juno, scarcely clad, sitting on a cloud alongside a peacock, her identifying attribute. Ambrogi confidently identified it as Juno summoning Allecto, the fury, from Book VII.

For Ambrogi, the equivalence between the ancient painting and Virgil’s poem reached down to the very lines of the text. Accompanying the passage in Book X of the *Aeneid* where Virgil describes the tragic death of Pallas, we find what appears to be an “illustration” of the scene (see figure 1). The engraving shows a sinewy and Christlike figure carried in a torch-lit procession by his fellow soldiers, whose curvilinear shields are displayed prominently in the foreground.<sup>99</sup> Behind stand two dark medieval

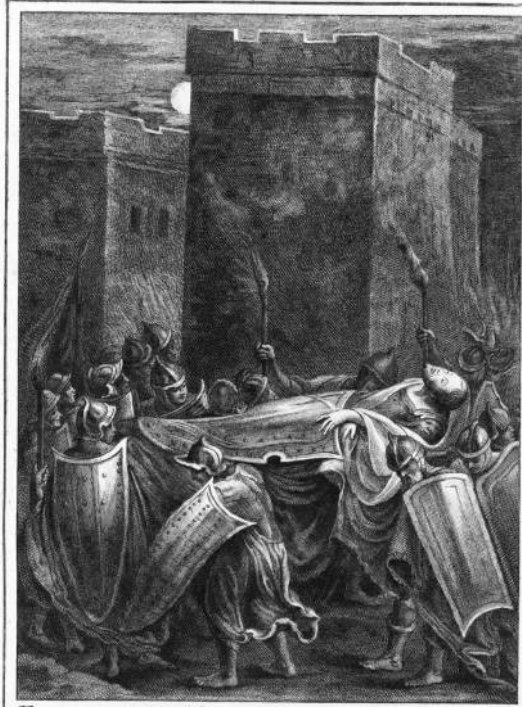
96. P. Virgilii Maronis *Bucolica, Georgica et Aeneis ex cod. medico-laurentiano descripta ab Antonio Ambrogio Florentino S.J. italico versu reddita. Adnotationibus atque variantibus lectionibus et antiquissimi codici vaticani picturis pluribusque aliis veterum monumentis aere incisus et clarorum virorum dissertationibus illustrata*, 3 vols. (Rome, 1763 [vol. 1], 1764 [vol. 2], 1765 [vol. 3]). The Bartoli images were actually copies of Cassiano dal Pozzo’s own copies of the Vatican Virgil. See José Ruysschaert, “Les Dossiers dal Pozzo et Massimo des illustrations virgilenes antiques de 1632 à 1782,” in *Cassiano dal Pozzo: Atti del Seminario Internazionale di Studi*, ed. Francesco Solinas (Rome, 1989), 177–85. On the manuscript and printed editions of the Vatican Virgil, see David Wright, *The Vatican Vergil: A Masterpiece of Late Antique Art* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993).

97. Antonio Ambrogi, preface to Virgil, *Bucolica Georgica et Aeneis*, 1:xxvii.

98. *Ibid.*

99. The copyist-engraver of this painting, Gregorio Giusti di Orazio (1732–1787), had studied in Rome with Pompeo Batoni, a well-known portrait painter of British aristocrats on the Grand Tour. Giusti was employed by Contucci at the Kircher museum to design copies of his collection. See Emmanuel Bénézit, *Dictionnaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs, et graveurs* (Paris, 1999), 199. Due to the use of different designers for the five engravings, the conflicting styles of the copies tend to obscure the common features of the original painter’s handiwork.

AENEIDOS LIB. X.



Ex antiq. pict. in Museo Kirk. alt. poll. 13. lat. poll. 7.

Scop. chiesa del.

Baratti. Indip.

Inpositum scuto referunt Pallanta frequentes.  
 O dolor. atq. decus magnum rediture parenti.  
 Haec te prima dies bello dedit. haec eadem aufert.  
 Cum tamen ingentis Rutulorum linquis acervos.  
 Nec jam fama mali tanti. fet certior auctor  
 Advolat Aeneae. tenui discrimine leti

510  
 Effè

*Affollatisi intorno i suoi compagni  
 Entro lo scudo riportar Pallante.  
 Oh quanto di dolor, quanto di gloria  
 Cagion farai nel tuo ritorno al padre!  
 Ch' alla guerra ti diè, questo fu' l primo*

*Giorno, ed è quel, ch' a lei ti toglie; e pure  
 Vi lasci a monti i tuoi nemici uccisi.  
 Nè già la fama sol, ma certo avviso  
 Di sventura sì grave a Enea perviene:  
 In gran periglio i suoi trovarsi, e tempo*

740

ANNO TAZIONI

L'aggiunto rame è copiato da una pittura del Museo Kirkeriano, nella quale si esprime il detto qui dal Poeta.

1 E' conosciuto il costume degli antichi di riportare i soldati morti generosamente in battaglia dentro lo scudo suo.

FIGURE 1. P. Virgilii Maronis Bucolica, Georgica et Aeneis ex cod. mediceo-laurentiano (Rome, 1765), Typ 725.63.869, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

towers. In the text below, Ambrogi provided the reader with the original Latin and his own vernacular translation, but he made an odd blunder. Ambrogi translated the original phrase “inpositum scuto” (upon the shield) as “entro lo scudo” (inside the shield). To compound this minor error, Ambrogi added a footnote to enlighten his readers: “it is a known custom of the ancients to carry back the bodies of the soldiers who died valiantly in battle *inside* the stripped shield.” Indeed, the engraving that accompanies the passage shows the fallen soldier carried *inside*, not upon, his own shield. Ambrogi underscored this reciprocity between word and image with a comment at the bottom of the page: “The print is copied from a picture in the Kircher museum and it conveys the words written here by the poet.”<sup>100</sup>

Given that the engraving corresponds exactly to the inaccurate translation, is it possible that Guerra followed Ambrogi’s words, that is, could the Roman Jesuits at the Kircher museum have commissioned these paintings from Guerra in order to illustrate the Virgil edition? Paciaudi related in a letter to Caylus in 1760 that an accomplice of Guerra’s had confessed that Father Contucci “was at the head of this imposture, it was he who provided the ideas and the subjects to paint.” An avowed enemy of the Jesuits, Paciaudi seized upon the opportunity the forgeries provided to discredit the order itself (“would it not make a nice article for the Jansenist gazette or for the editor of the news reports coming out of Portugal?” he asked).<sup>101</sup> Antonio Piaggio, who was in charge of deciphering the papyri discovered in Herculaneum, mentioned in his 1769 memoirs that the Jesuits initially planned to publish the Guerra paintings as antiquities from Palmyra, the ancient Roman city in Syria, rather than from the Bourbon-controlled Campania in order to avoid being accused of theft. Piaggio, who described Contucci as “shrewd,” accused the Jesuits of knowingly publishing forgeries, but not of conspiring with Guerra to create them.<sup>102</sup> However, both Piaggio and Paciaudi had reason to resent the Jesuits and their information was secondhand.

But if the Jesuits did not commission the forgeries, how could the painting and the classical text align so perfectly? The only explanation is that Ambrogi based his own translation of Virgil’s passage on the painting, believing it to be authentic. There is one piece of evidence supporting this hypothesis. In 1762, three years before the illustrated Virgil was printed, Ambrogi’s translation was published by a different printer in Rome—without illustrations. In Book X of the *Aeneid*, Ambrogi translated the line about Pallas’s shield as “entro lo scudo” and he cited Guerra’s painting in the footnote, but with a slight difference: “it is a known custom of the ancients to carry back the bodies of the soldiers who died valiantly in battle inside his shield. In the Gallery of the Roman College, among the other singular paintings, *you will find an Epaminondas*

100. Virgil, *Bucolica Georgica et Aeneis*, 3:191. The stylistic features of this print—what we would now call the High Baroque—are recognizable to us even in the copy, but they were all but invisible to contemporaries.

101. Paciaudi to Caylus, September 2, 1760, in Paciaudi, *Lettres*, 172.

102. D. Bassi, “Altre lettere inedite del P. Antonio Piaggio,” 324, 329–30. Robert Wood had generated much excitement among antiquaries with his architectural-archaeological publication *The Ruins of Palmyra, otherwise Tadmor, in the desert* (London, 1753).

carried with his shield from the famous pitched battle.”<sup>103</sup> This Epaminondas must be the same painting that Winckelmann described in his letter to Brühl.<sup>104</sup> Three years later, in the illustrated edition of Virgil, Ambrogio omitted the original title of this painting and let the reader believe that it depicted Pallas’s death rather than that of the Theban general. If the forgery had been commissioned by the Jesuits to illustrate their Virgil, as Paciaudi believed, they would never have displayed it to visitors nor identified it in print as a painting of Epaminondas. Ambrogio was thus guilty only of disguising the original subject of the painting to make it seem more illustrative of Virgil’s epic, which suggests that he believed it to be a genuine antique. That Ambrogio let the painting determine his translation of Virgil’s text, that he put *seeing* before *reading*, is an extraordinary testament to the power of ancient art in this period. Antonio Piaggio nicely captured the dizzying effect of Guerra’s paintings on antiquaries: “[Guerra] painted a thousand oddities and whimsical events that never happened, battles with strangely dressed amazons, fires, sacrifices, abductions, etc. He did this—as I said—to turn the heads of the most renowned men in that capital of the world. If he painted poetic fables or passages from true histories, he made their heads turn even more.”<sup>105</sup>

### ~ Fakers and Artists

In his assessment of the Guerra forgery, Piaggio described imposture as a moral failing, “the sister of impudence and arrogance.”<sup>106</sup> Yet it is difficult to find any consensus regarding the morality of Guerra’s forgery. La Condamine offered no moral judgment of Guerra; in fact, he seemed to admire the artist for his technical virtuosity. The Bourbons saw the forgery as a crime and Guerra himself as an unauthorized copyist of their originals, but they were unconcerned about the epistemological hazards of forgery. Winckelmann offered the strongest condemnation of the forger as a threat to scholarship. Paciaudi too was incensed by Guerra’s deception, and although he seemed particularly offended by the possible complicity of the Jesuits, he was worried about the effect of the forgeries on future antiquarian scholarship. “Take the most perfect of these paintings,” he wrote to Caylus, “one that possesses all the character of Guerra’s composition, and thirty years from now no one will know this imposture anymore. They will not know how many people were duped by their good faith, and what is worse, they will consider these paintings as antiques. It would be fitting if this story were set down in some book to warn men of letters to be on their guard.”<sup>107</sup> Paciaudi even suggested an entire book devoted to the history of impostors of antiquities beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Caylus sent Paciaudi the paragraph on

103. *L'Eneide di P. Virgilio Marone tradotta in versi dal P. Antonio Ambrogio* (Rome: Salomoni, 1759–62), 3:136. I am grateful to Matteo Residori for this reference. Italics mine.

104. Mariette de Vos reproduced a fragment, alleged to be of Guerra’s original fresco of Epaminondas, in an appendix to her study of the Farnese frescoes; “Nerone, Seneca, Fabullo e la Domus Transitoria al Palatino,” in *Gli Orti Farnesiani sul Palatino*, ed. Giuseppe Morganti (Rome, 1990), 185–86. This fragment is in a remote corner of a storage room in Naples’s archaeological museum. I have examined it in detail and it does not match the image reproduced in Ambrogio’s Virgil.

105. D. Bassi, “Altre lettere inedite del P. Antonio Piaggio,” 327.

106. *Ibid.*, 330.

107. Paciaudi to Caylus, September 2, 1760, in Paciaudi, *Lettres*, 172.

the Guerra affair that he would eventually publish in the fourth volume of the *Recueil*. Paciaudi was not satisfied, complaining that Caylus's account was "not detailed enough to warn and instruct posterity," but Caylus evidently did not see the advantages of such an exposure.<sup>108</sup> In the *Recueil*, Caylus refused to publish any image of Guerra's work or to identify Contucci as the suspected collaborator in the forgeries, saying only:

Those who [restore through repainting] do not seem to me as culpable as the forgers of our time who come to inundate us with a great number of paintings that they have claimed to have found on the walls in the excavations outside of Naples, or in other hidden excavations outside of Rome, of which they claim the only knowledge. It was left to me to make an engraving of some of these which were sent to me from Rome, but I believed that it would lend too much dignity to these contemptible works, which were pointed out solely to return to the oblivion from which they came.<sup>109</sup>

Although the art forgery of Guerra had served Caylus as an opportunity to make use of the interdisciplinary techniques and ideas that he was himself promoting in the pages of his *Recueil*, he refused to make a public account of his own investigation or the methods by which he proved the paintings to be forgeries. Paciaudi, by contrast, wanted Caylus to offer detailed descriptions of the paintings to prevent future antiquaries from mistaking them for original antiques: "you should, in my opinion, indicate the method used in these paintings, the conduct of the workers themselves, their defects, and specify what allows us to know that [the paintings] are false."<sup>110</sup> In short, everything that Caylus and his correspondents discussed in their private letters. In the end, however, Winckelmann was the only contemporary to publicize the methods he used, but then, his own history of ancient art depended—even more than Caylus's *Recueil*—on his supreme authority as a connoisseur; he also had less to lose by going public. This German son of a cobbler and grandson of a weaver did not belong to the French academy, and he spent most of his short life acting as a gadfly to the more established antiquaries in Rome and Naples. The Parisian antiquaries and connoisseurs were more willing to admit to their gullibility (at least in their private correspondence) if it meant learning something about Guerra's techniques, while the combative German scholar asserted the primacy of individual taste in print and batted the forger away as if his falsity were contagious.

Caylus's arch condemnation of Guerra in the pages of his *Recueil* and his claim that any reproduction of the paintings would "lend too much dignity to these con-

108. Paciaudi to Caylus, March 22, 1760, *ibid.*, 135.

109. Caylus, *Recueil des antiquités*, 4:219–20. He continued, "I do not want to name the antiquary whom they say has acted as his agent; I am not capable of such odious conduct." Caylus's defense of Contucci may have been primarily self-interested since the Jesuit had provided him with information and choice antiquities in Rome. On the other hand, Caylus had only Paciaudi's word regarding Contucci's guilt.

110. Paciaudi to Caylus, March 22, 1760, in Paciaudi, *Lettres*, 135.

temptible works” suggests that Caylus felt compromised by the episode (and Winckelmann’s public accusation the following year lends support to Caylus’s sense of his own vulnerability). However, in a private letter to La Condamine sent four years before his account of the forgery in the *Recueil*, Caylus characterized Guerra’s forgeries in less severe terms: “I’ve come to believe that the little flood of ancient paintings that appeared last year in Rome was a prank [une friponnerie].”<sup>111</sup> This same word—*friponnerie*—appears in the fifth volume of his *Recueil* where Caylus discusses a bas-relief of a temple on a silver coin identified (wrongly, Caylus believes) as an Antonine medal. Caylus doubted its antiquity and went on to suggest that amateurs could teach contemporary artists as well as forgers to make their works achieve the look of the ancient: “Deceivers always make certain errors. The trifles that seem unimportant to most people reveal their *friponnerie*; but when the fakers are artists alone, their errors are more frequent. They need to be guided by men instructed in the differences that the centuries present.”<sup>112</sup> As an adviser to painters trying to imitate the antique, Caylus here draws no moral line between “faker” and “artist.” Both need expert advice. Indeed, Caylus’s 1755 scientific *Mémoire sur la peinture à l’encaustique* could have easily functioned as a manual for forgers. Caylus even had one of his protégés, Joseph-Marie Vien, make a small painting *à la antique* on a wooden panel according to the encaustic method of the ancients (the painting, *Tête à Minerve*, was actually a composite: three-quarters encaustic, one-quarter oil painting), which he then presented to the academy as a demonstration of the lost technique of ancient artists.<sup>113</sup> Caylus’s reliance on his knowledge of ancient art to *make* modern art blurred the line between forgery and deep imitation. One might argue that such a line had to be blurred in order to detect a forgery in the first place.<sup>114</sup> By approaching Guerra’s paintings as the act of a working artist, Caylus was able to investigate the forgery more thoroughly—and I would argue, to understand it better—than those who saw the forgery as a crime or as a threat to the antiquary’s entire “system of knowledge.”

### Conclusion

What can the story of Guerra’s false paintings, clearly an episode in the revolution in taste, tell us about the revolution in historical method? For one thing, the revolution in historical method was not limited to the convergence of antiquarian erudition with narrative history. In eighteenth-century France, certain antiquaries had come to

111. Caylus to La Condamine, February 7, 1757, in Caylus, *Correspondance inédite*, 2:74.

112. Caylus, *Recueil*, 5:251–52, quoted in Irène Aghion, “Les doutes du Comte de Caylus,” *Vrai ou Faux? Copier, imiter, falsifier*, exh. cat., Bibliothèque Nationale, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1991), 28.

113. Caylus also provided detailed steps for artists to follow: “Stretch a piece of cloth upon a frame, rub the back of that cloth with wax, paint your subject on the other side, with colors prepared and tempered with water, and when dry bring the picture near the fire and by melting the wax, fix the colors”; *Mémoire sur la peinture à l’encaustique*, 8.

114. On the “uncharacteristic” forgeries of the humanists themselves, see Grafton, *Forgers and Critics*, chap. 2. On the difficulties in unpacking the motives for humanist forgery and the dangers of “moral anachronism,” see James Hankins, “Forging Links with the Past,” *Journal of the Modern History of Ideas* 52 (1991): 509–18.



believe that the monuments of antiquity reflected, above all, the creative faculties of the people who made them. Any understanding of what ancient history meant in the eighteenth century thus has to take into account the visual tradition of antiquarianism and the new theories of art developed in the French academies. It also has to take into account the precise methods by which these new antiquaries evaluated ancient monuments. Caylus, La Condamine, Barthélemy, and Paciaudi drew from a variety of methods and disciplines: connoisseurship, with its attention to the mechanics of painting and to the singular style of the artist; the new art criticism, with its emphasis on the faculty of taste as a form of evidence; and the antiquarian's iconographic, ethnographical, and historical knowledge of the ancient world. As an academician preoccupied with reforming the arts in line with perceived ancient taste, Caylus, in particular, proposed a new understanding of the distant past by re-creating as faithfully as possible the same technologies, the same materials, the same taste. In other words, the revolution in taste was itself a revolution in historical method.

I want to end by quoting a work distinguished by Momigliano as a landmark of seventeenth-century antiquarianism: Francesco Bianchini's *La istoria universale provata con monumenti e figurata con simboli degli antichi* (A universal history proven with monuments and illustrated with the symbols of the ancients). "What makes Bianchini's work very remarkable," Momigliano wrote, "is the underlying conviction that archaeological evidence (or, as Bianchini calls it, 'storia per simboli') makes a firmer basis for history than literary evidence."<sup>115</sup> In other words, Bianchini was one of those antiquaries who responded to the challenges of Pyrrhonism by making use of the evidence provided by ancient monuments. In doing so, however, Bianchini set up a rivalry between antiquities and classicizing works of art:

I can make use of a picture of Raphael or Titian in order to help the imagination represent the triumph of Titus. Yet if I see the bas-relief on his arch, which represents his triumph on a chariot, if I read the inscription added there by the Senate, if I gaze at the ancient medals where he is displayed as a conqueror, these images form a much deeper impression on the mind. *Not because they entice the eyes with their beauty or masterful design*, but because the images penetrate the intellect with ancient characters, which serve as testimony to that which is represented. . . . The conception of the deed impresses itself firmly and with persuasive force. And the idea of history is thus deeply retained in the mind, sanctioned rather than merely proposed."<sup>116</sup>

115. Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquary," 299. On the wider context for Bianchini's work, see Tamara Griggs, "Universal History from Counter-Reformation to Enlightenment," *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 2 (2007): 219–47, and *Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) und die europäische gelehrte Welt um 1700*, ed. Valentin Kockel and Brigitte Sölch (Berlin, 2005).

116. Francesco Bianchini, *La istoria universale* (Rome, 1697), 20. Italics mine.

In seventeenth-century antiquarianism, the encounter with an ancient monument, and thus with the age it evoked, surpassed the singular power of the modern artist to represent that history. But note that even within that same monument, the aesthetic qualities (its “beauty” and “masterful design”) could not surpass its evidentiary value. For eighteenth-century antiquaries, less preoccupied with certifying history, such an opposition was no longer tenable.

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