

This article was downloaded by: [Harvard College]

On: 07 June 2013, At: 10:18

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/twim20>

Promoting the past: The Hypnerotomachia Poliphili as antiquarian enterprise

Tamara Griggs

Published online: 14 Sep 2012.

To cite this article: Tamara Griggs (1998): Promoting the past: The Hypnerotomachia Poliphili as antiquarian enterprise, Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry, 14:1-2, 17-39

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02666286.1998.10443940>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Promoting the past: *the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* as antiquarian enterprise

TAMARA GRIGGS

Terso lector, adunque ascolta ascolta
Gli somni di Poliphilo narrante,
Dal ciel demissi cum dolceza molta.
Non perderai el tempo stravagante,
Anci iubilerai de haver udito
L'opra di varie cose exuberante.

(*Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, Venice, 1499)

[Brief reader, listen, listen now to the dreams narrated by Poliphilus, sent down from the heavens with much sweetness. Do not waste time wantonly, but rather rejoice in having heard a work of such true and abundant things.]

Despite Colonna's enticement above, very few readers in the fifteenth century would have taken seriously the claim that the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* was sent down from the heavens as a receptacle of divine revelation.¹ Those who shouted 'poliphilian words!' to stifle the pretentious windbags in the Venetian senate did not seem to mind profaning this enigmatic work. Castiglione, concerned above all with effective social grace, also found something objectionable in this learned fantasy when he derided the 'Poliphilian' language of those courtiers who had the bad taste to strut around in a costume of alienating erudition.² Indeed, the hybrid artificial language of Colonna's illustrated romance is alienating for those who prefer to keep their Latin and Greek endings separate. The narrative plot consists of an incoherent series of encounters with fantastical architecture, amorous nymphs, and ancient occult mysteries, all of which our contemporary narrator, Poliphilo, describes in onerous detail. In short, this is a book admired for its images, but seldom read.

Yet those interested in the cultural history of the book should not allow Castiglione the last word. If we wish to attend to the intellectual experiments in which fifteenth-century artists, architects and humanist collectors were engaged, we need to consider not only the experiments which were successful, but also those that perhaps were not. Within this paper I would like to trace certain archetypes and cultural contexts for the *Hypnerotomachia* and to demonstrate how this peculiar illustrated romance adopted the verbal and visual strategies of earlier fifteenth-century works. The *Hypnerotomachia* is a work of imagination and invention, but it was not 'dal ciel demisso.' The book marks the culmination of fifteenth-century antiquarianism as it coincided with the emergence and refinement of printed books under the heady patronage of Italian court culture. Poliphilo acts

1 – *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, p. xii.

2 – Magnifico, in explaining how not to court women, attacks the inflated language of the *Hypnerotomachia* as a social hurdle since such 'wilfully studied obscurity' backfires, rendering the courtier merely tedious: 'I have known some [who] use nothing but Poliphilian words when writing or speaking to women and employ such ingenious rhetoric that the women lose all their self-confidence and . . . it seems an eternity till they can end the conversation and get rid of the man concerned.' See Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), trans. George Bull (New York, 1976), p. 271.

as expert guide and consummate describer of the evocative landscape of antiquity and he represents, perhaps in unintentionally comic ways, the rise of the antiquarian connoisseur in Renaissance court culture. This paper will explore the ways in which the *Hypnerotomachia* borrowed from the genre of court pageantry literature, itself devoted to memorializing the classical displays and state-of-the-art theater technology which were all the rage in Italian élite circles. Colonna's debts to both Alberti's investigations of ancient architecture and engineering and the fantasy advertising of Filarete also reveal themselves at every turn of the romance, but I want to trace the ancestry of the book more centrally to two antiquarian precursors, the *commentaria* of Cyriaco d'Ancona and the mid-century antiquarian *sylloge*. I believe that these topographically organized manuscripts of ancient inscriptions, edifices and sculpture form the closest archetypes for Colonna's antiquarian romance.

In attempting to characterize fifteenth-century antiquarianism, which I take to be the central context for Colonna's work, we should be careful not to ascribe Romantic conceptions to these Renaissance representations of the ancient past. When describing the *Hypnerotomachia*, many art historians have interpreted the enigmatic landscape, depicted through both illustrations and verbal narrative, as an aesthetic hallucination of the classical age, evidence of the antiquarian longing to restore the fragmented past to an imagined perfection. Charles Mitchell argued that Colonna, 'with his head full of antiquarian writing, Horapollo's hieroglyphs and pagan religion, meant to transport us into an antique world.'³ Anthony Blunt went even further in claiming that 'antiquity was a world in which [Colonna] could find all his desires satisfied; it was a substitute for life, not a guide to it.'⁴ Yet Poliphilo is not Keats gazing at the cold pastoral of the Grecian urn and the concept of antiquity did not comprise a coherent set of assumptions about the past.⁵ We might even challenge the modern assumption that underlies Blunt's interpretation of Poliphilo's dream as a form of wish-fulfillment or escape. The *Hypnerotomachia* was informed partly by a literary tradition that connected dreaming, spiritual existence and romantic love as a way of imparting moral lessons relevant to waking existence.⁶ It is therefore unlikely that Colonna employed the device as a way of creating an ideal of antiquity for the sake of those readers who wanted to lose themselves in a landscape of myths and statues.

Rather than seek earnest appeals to an idealized antiquity in Colonna's romance, we should approach the *Hypnerotomachia* instead as the work of a keen connoisseur. The *Hypnerotomachia* ultimately belongs to the wider public world of court 'service professionals,' that is, the circle of architects, intellectuals, engineers and poets who promoted themselves and their knowledge of antiquity within the increasingly vernacular culture of fifteenth-century Italian courts. Comparison with the similarly ambitious publications of other service professionals confirms that Colonna's strategies of erudition and claims of cultural value fit within this context. One such professional, Guglielmo Ebreo, a dance-master attached to the Urbino court, composed a treatise on the art of dancing in which he attempted to elevate the courtly dance by tracing its pedigree to the mythological deities of antiquity and by setting out precise prescriptions, the mastery of which required 'vera intelligenza & cognitione'.⁷ In his

³ – Charles Mitchell, 'Archeology and romance in Renaissance Italy', in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, ed. E. F. Jacob (London, 1965), p. 467.

⁴ – Anthony Blunt, 'The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* in seventeenth-century France', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 1 (1937), p. 118.

⁵ – For the relationship between antiquarianism and history, see Philip Jacks, *The Antiquarian and the Myth of Antiquity: The Origin of Rome in Renaissance Thought* (Cambridge, 1993) and Momigliano's classic article, 'Ancient history and the antiquarian', in *Studies in Historiography*, ed. R. Winks (London, 1965). Also see Eric Cochrane, *Historian and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago, 1981) and J. Levine, *Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography* (Ithaca, 1987).

⁶ – On the conventions of visionary literature, see A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge, 1976).

⁷ – Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro, *De practica seu arte tripudi*, ed. and trans. Barbara Sparti (Oxford, 1993), p. 114.

8 – *De practica*, p. 90: '[the art of dancing] is completely alien to, and the mortal enemy of, vile and rude mechanicals who often, with corrupt souls and treacherous minds, turn it from a liberal art and virtuous science into something adulterous and ignoble.'

9 – Angelo Decembrio, *De politia litteraria*, cod. Vat. lat. 1794, f. 150–2 in J. P. Perry, 'A fifteenth-century dialogue on literary taste: Angelo Decembrio's account of playwright Ugolino Pisani at the Court of Leonello d'Este', *Renaissance Quarterly* XXXIX (1986), pp. 613–43. Along with his commentary, Perry includes the full Latin version and provides an English translation.

10 – Perry, p. 640, translation on p. 633: 'Ugolino was undoubtedly blushing. He was aware in general of natural philosophy and logic, from the study of which he recalled that certain things pertain to bodily senses and others to that of the mind.'

11 – Perry, p. 632.

12 – Anthony Grafton and Brian Curran, 'A fifteenth-century site report on the Vatican Obelisk', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 58 (1995), pp. 234–48.

preface, Guglielmo vigorously defends *l'arte del danzare* against accusations of vulgarity and claims for it the status of a liberal art: 'aliena in tutto & mortal inimicha di vitiosi & mechanici plebei: i quali le piu volte con animo corrotto & colla scelerata mente la fano di arte liberale & virtuosa scienza: adultera e servile.'⁸

Angelo Decembrio, another court professional equally obsessed with the distinction between vulgarity and refinement, plays the same game as Guglielmo, though with less ingenuousness. Decembrio is best known for his *De politia litteraria* (1462), an extended series of dialogues in which his coterie at the Ferrara court discourse about the merits of literature and art.⁹ The dialogue in which the courtiers of Leonello d'Este take turns ridiculing Ugolino Pisani's work on the art of cooking for its lack of refinement and Ugolino himself for his own 'vulgar and corrupt speech' ('vulgarique sermonum corruptione') vividly captures the social customs of this self-creating élite. The courtiers one by one reduce the itinerant playwright and entertainer to a muddled self-defense culminating in Ugolino's painful attempt to make sense of their literary argument through a hazy recall of his youthful studies: 'erubescat haud dubie Parmensis alioquin philosophiae naturalis logicaeque doctrinae conscius, cuius studio meminisset quaedam ad corporeum sensum, alia ad animalem pertinere.'¹⁰ By exposing the emptiness of Ugolino's literary claims through their own sophisticated handling of argument and author, Decembrio makes it clear that he and the other courtiers are the ones with the expertise to distinguish between 'poet laureate' and 'poet larvate'.¹¹

In two other dialogues, Decembrio relies on the expertise of Alberti to bolster his own discussions on art and architecture. Michael Baxandall's analysis of Leonello's monologue on the superiority of ancient poetic description to painting reveals Decembrio's explicit miming of Alberti's *Della pictura* (1435), while, more recently, Anthony Grafton and Brian Curran have argued that Decembrio also incorporated his knowledge of Alberti's architectural writings into Guarino's earlier discussion of the Vatican obelisk.¹² In both of these dialogues, the debate thrives on the manipulation of the authority derived from ancient writers in the service of one's claims, whether it be the legend of Julius Caesar's ashes or the supremacy of poetic description. As the courtiers vie with each other in their observations, countering one subtle reference from Pliny with another from Juvenal, we become witnesses to the way this fifteenth-century Italian élite formed itself through its appropriation of techniques and symbols culled from the literary, epigraphic and archeological evidence of antiquity.

As a document belonging to this distinct period of élite formation involving a variety of attempted integrations of antiquarian symbolism and court patronage, the *Hypnerotomachia* invited its readers to confront its sophisticated mysteries through verbal and visual strategies which we find in earlier works by pageantry poets, architects, and antiquarian epigraphers, all of whom championed certain skills in interpreting and describing the textual and material world of antiquity. The visual culture of art, the learned classical and contemporary literature as well as specialized craft techniques thus all act as diverse sources for the motifs and the meanings which Colonna greedily appropriates for his fantastical romance.

The opening lines of the *Hypnerotomachia* present the reader with an ‘aurorae descriptio,’ an elaborate and studied portrait of the sunrise drawn from both classical mythology and vernacular poetry. In the Petrarchan shift from the description of the external landscape to the presentation of the subjective voice of the tormented lover who declares himself — ‘io Poliphilo, sopra el lectulo mio iacendo’ [‘I, Poliphilo, lying upon my bed’] — the reader is alerted to a learned and allusive literary world.¹³ Throughout the romance, Poliphilo compares himself to almost every mythological character imaginable. At one point, and in the space of four lines, he manages to identify himself with Mercury, Apollo, Oedipus, Perseus, and Psyche. Besides lyricizing his own emotional state, what Poliphilo does best is give a description of every object he encounters during his errant dream voyage. These ekphrastic descriptions act as staged performances through which Poliphilo displays his skill not only in describing the craftsmanship of art and architecture, but also in interpreting and manipulating its meaning.¹⁴

When it comes to interpreting, however, Poliphilo sometimes needs assistance. After having entered the massive structure of the elephant and obelisk, Poliphilo encounters two statues facing each other on top of sepulchers; each holds a shield inscribed with an epigram in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Poliphilo makes no attempt to interpret the meaning, claiming that ‘dil tutto restai ignaro et dilla interpretatione et sophismo significato molto ambiguo.’¹⁵ Later, under the tutelage of Logistica, Poliphilo recalls these two statues and asks her to interpret their meaning for him. After instructing him that such divine conceptions demand a ‘perplexibilitate dello intellecto,’ Logistica explains the riddle as a warning to forgo idleness for industry.¹⁶ From this exchange, it is clear that the ekphrastic descriptions and hieroglyphic decoding in the *Hypnerotomachia* do not function as subtle prolepses of an intricate narrative which the reader is encouraged to evaluate as part of a coherent plot. Despite the heavy-handed warning by the nymphs to pay attention to the divine meanings, these images and trilingual riddles accumulate either as discrete variations of moral proverbs which serve as generic guides to life — patience, industry, moderation — or as a barely disguised Christian pedagogy. Given that certain hieroglyphs derive from etymological riddles while others require knowledge of classical mythology to unravel, they constitute discrete challenges to the sophisticated reader to interpret them according to a variety of techniques. As Poliphilo moves between naivety and skilled verbal appraisal, he figures himself as both the knowing contriver and the dumbfounded audience.

When led by the five nymphs to the court of the Queen Eleuterilida, Poliphilo describes every visible surface of the court palace. Nothing escapes his itemizing vision as it moves through the interior of the court detailing every course of the staged feast including the decorative vessels carried in on portable tables, the changing color and fabric of the tablecloths, and the ingredients of each sauce. Later, when Poliphilo is confronted with the triumphs, he describes in the precise order of appearance each mythological story represented on the panels of the chariots. Even the wheels, spokes, naves and axels of the chariot itself serve as worthy ekphrastic subjects. The woodcut illustrations show not merely a

¹³ — *Hypnerotomachia*, p. 4.

¹⁴ — Although primarily influenced by medieval romance, the *Hypnerotomachia* may have incorporated certain elements from the Greek novel tradition, particularly in its use of these staged ekphrases. For Colonna’s debt to the illustrated medieval romance, see Helena K. Szepe, *The Poliphilo and other Aldines Reconsidered in the Context of the Production of Decorated Books in Venice* (unpublished Cornell dissertation, 1991). For an astute analysis of the ekphrastic descriptions and interpretative strategies in ancient Greek novels, see Shadi Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel: The Reader and the Role of Description in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius* (Princeton, 1989). Bartsch’s definition of ekphrasis as the revelation of symbolic meaning through allegory or riddle, rather than the explication of motives or causes for creation, fits nicely with the way that Colonna uses hieroglyphs and riddles throughout the *Hypnerotomachia*.

¹⁵ — *Hypnerotomachia*, p. 32: ‘I remained ignorant of the interpretation and of the very ambiguous sophistic meaning’.

¹⁶ — Ibid., p. 124.

17 – Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, 1981), p. 167. Muir describes in great detail the organization of masquerades, dances, and feasts as well as the construction of pageant apparatus and theatrical stages by the *Compagnie delle calze* in Venice.

18 – *Hypnerotomachia*, p. xii: ‘pyramids, obelisks, huge ruins of buildings...a great horse, an enormous elephant, a colossus’.

19 – *La Magnificence de la Superbe et Triumphant Entrée de la Noble & Antique Cité de Lyon Faict au Treschrétien Roy de France Henry II, M.D. XLVIII* (Lyon, 1927), p. 18.

20 – ‘The triumph was created in this form/it had four sides, each one at the top sloped down in magnificent order/and it stood upon four wheels and each one was perfectly balanced and sharpened down/and all the wheels spun when one was moved./Now I want to tell you of the gracefulness of its composition on every side, and how polished, agile and worthy it was./Each surface reached five braccia from the bottom/and each was decorated with so many ornaments/that it seemed impossible to me that it had ever been created.’ BNCF, MS Magliabechiano, VII 1121, f. 74r-v and f. 75v. Cited in Rosella Bessi, ‘Lo Spettacolo e la Scrittura’, *Il Tempo Si Rinuova: Feste e Spettacoli nella Firenze di Lorenzo Magnifico* (Florence, 1992), p. 108.

generic type of every object, but distinct variations so that the reader can admire one by one the diverse sorts of trophies and heralds represented.

Poliphilo’s attention to the stages of the courtly feast and to the accumulating detail and seamless procession of the triumphs underscores the need for skilled description to convey the artistry of specialized crafts; only the expert observer can capture the ingenious devices and surface beauty of wheeled fountains, trophies and jeweled reliquaries. Poliphilo’s role as our guide to these spectacles is informed by the larger culture of court pageantry during the fifteenth century, what Edward Muir has called ‘a calculated affair, a civic drama directed by experts.’¹⁷ Court festival literature usually involved elaborate descriptions of an entire staged event in which the author would figuratively walk his reader through the pageant by describing the sights one by one. The verbal guidance within these festival books recalls the *Hypnerotomachia*’s opening address to the reader in which the author foregrounds the series of sights to be beheld, piling one upon the other — ‘pyramide, obelisci, ruine maxime di edificii . . . uno magno caballo, uno maximo elephanto, uno colosso’ — all as a kind of enticing advertisement for the ‘mirande cose’ contained within.¹⁸

Civic and court pageantry, essentially a moving visual copia, was intended to overwhelm the viewer, as one description of the Royal Entry of Francis II into Lyon makes clear. Accompanied by woodcut illustrations of pyramids and triumphal arches, this commemorative pageantry book ends with these words: ‘Je vous laisse a penser lequel estoit plus grant ou le contentment ou l’esbaissement de chascun de tous ceulx qui en les regardant leur sembloit perdre la veue en l’admiration d’une chose incroyable.’¹⁹ The *Hypnerotomachia* provides an idealized portrait of those festivals which aimed at a kind of pleasing mystification and sought to overwhelm and delight the citizens with visual marvels of wheeled fountains, tripods, trophies and architectural monuments. Colonna follows the conventions of contemporary poetic accounts of these courtly triumphs by encoding praise in the same fashion. One earlier poem, which sets out in verse a Florentine triumph moving from San Marco to San Giovanni in honor of the Medici, explicitly stages the description itself and provides a model for Poliphilo’s own self-conscious narration of the triumphs:

El triunfo era fatto in questa forma
aveva quattro facce, che ognuna
all’insù digradava con gran norma,
Et posa in quattro rote che ciascuna
era in bilico grande a rrotar via,
et ruotan tutte, chi ne movesse una.
Ora ti vo’ contar la leggiadria
di sua composizion per ogni faccia,
et quanto lustro, snello et degno sia.
Ciascuna faccia è dappiè cinque braccia
et è ornata di tanto ornamento
che ’npossibil mi par che mai si faccia.²⁰

The extreme attention which this kind of ‘chroniche rimate’ paid to the narrative stages and the interminable lingering on every accumulating detail functioned as an explicit encomium to the court itself. In its attentiveness to every passing detail and to the constructed staging of the

pageantry, the description thus pays tribute to the flawless and reasoned organization of the state to whom the pageantry is dedicated.²¹

In describing the staging of the procession and the organization of the festival as a constructed vision, Poliphilo often confesses his fatigue and inadequacy: ‘alcuno mai di tanto indefesso eloquio aptamente se accomodarebbe . . . et expressamente narrare et cum quanto diva pompa, indesinenti triumphi, perenne gloria, festiva laetitia et foelice tripudio circa a queste quattro invisitate seiuge de memorando spectamine’.²² He thus manages to glorify the moving triumph which defies description while at the same time diverting attention to the heroic task of describing as a commendable performance in itself. This self-promoting practice again echoes those court pageantry poets — or ‘artisans of the pen,’ as Rosella Bessi astutely notes — who produced *rappresentazione* and *giostre* in rhymed chronicles between 1440 and the first decade of the sixteenth century.²³ Yet Colonna grants greater autonomy to the experience of the observer than these court poets could, tied as they were to describing real entries and pageants.

In the verbal reconstruction of pageantry spectacles, the narrator’s explication of the allegorical meaning of such artificial creations seems to demand an assessment that can praise the technical composition while still acknowledging the intended effect of illusion upon the audience. Yet this delicate balance between illusion and construction is not always maintained. Certain contemporary descriptions of real pageantry elide the contrivance and tend to confuse modern readers. The formula of disguise in these verbal accounts sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish between theatrical scaffolding and effective illusion. A description of a 1487 performance of Plautus’ *Amphitruo* at the court of Ferrara mentions a burning ‘paradise with stars’ which Jacob Burckhardt interpreted as an illumination with fireworks.²⁴ At another point, in describing a *Corpus Christi* procession at Viterbo in 1482, Burckhardt admits that ‘it is not clear from the account whether all the characters were living beings or some merely draped figures’.²⁵

Colonna, however, emphasizes the distinction between scaffolding and illusion by staging Poliphilo’s entry into the dreamworld as a deliberate turn away from the natural and human: ‘postponendo el naturale bisogno retro ad quella inhumana nota sencia mora cum festinante la via, io andai’.²⁶ When Poliphilo encounters the hollow statue which makes use of the passing wind to feign the sound of a horn, the human mimicry of the device both deceives and frightens him. Yet such mechanical devices can also be delightful. At one point, Poliphilo describes one of the fountains in the Queen’s bath as a ‘machina et curioso artificio,’ composed of two nymphs supporting the legs of a boy who holds his ‘instrumento puerile’ and replenishes the hot water with his own ‘aqua freschissima’.²⁷ The fountain operates by a weight device which charms Poliphilo, despite having been the victim of the artificer’s own cunning.

Poliphilo’s delight in grasping the deceiving artifice of these garden statues should be understood in the context of technological inventions for both court pageantry and theater. The visual propaganda and display of magnificence at these court performances encouraged artistic competition to create elaborate designs and ingenious devices.²⁸ Brunelleschi’s

²¹ – Bessi, p. 110.

²² – *Hypnerotomachia*, p. 171: ‘it is very hard for a man to accommodate his speech in apt terms . . . whereby he may expressly declare the great pomp, indefinite triumph, unceasing glory and festive rejoicing around these four strange chariots of noteworthy display’.

²³ – Bessi, p. 110.

²⁴ – Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London, 1929), p. 315.

²⁵ – Burckhardt, p. 408.

²⁶ – *Hypnerotomachia*, p. 10: ‘leaving natural need behind, I hurried toward that inhuman note without delay’.

²⁷ – Ibid., pp. 76–8.

²⁸ – Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals, 1450–1650* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1984), p. 62.

29 – Burckhardt, p. 406.

30 – Strong, p. 38. Where all of this interest in theatrical mechanics leads has been the subject of two excellent studies. On the growing fascination with the technology of *automata* and the baroque *kunstкамmer*, see Horst Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine* (Princeton, 1995) and on the developments of natural science and the emergence of museums in the context of the late Renaissance court, see Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley, 1994).

31 – Alberti, Leon Battista Alberti, *The Ten Books on Architecture: The 1775 Leoni Edition* (New York, 1986), Bk. I, Ch. I., p. 119 (hereafter *TBA*).

32 – *Hypnerotomachia*, p. 17: ‘With what celestial emulation was such a weight carried and set in such a place, with what art invented? With what power and human force? Who were the conveyors and porters, with what manner of wheels, and rowing devices, and upholding supporters was made the height of the Obelisk and the stateliness of the Pyramids?’

33 – Alberti, *TBA*, p. 1.

design for the Feast of the Annunciation involved the descent of Gabriel in an almond-shaped machine from a suspended globe which Leonardo later studied for his own elaborate astrological stage in service to the Sforza court in 1490.²⁹ The perfection of moveable scenery and the engineering feats of fifteenth-century ‘artisan-engineers’ like Brunelleschi and Leonardo da Vinci, along with the sophistication of theater and garden automata, inspired by Hero’s theorems, all contributed to an extremely vibrant exchange between technological engineering and court spectacle.³⁰

Engineering feats fascinate Poliphilo throughout his journey, but none moves him as much as the huge structure of the obelisk and elephant. As he muses on the motives and causes for such a creation, Poliphilo makes use of Alberti’s account in Book VI of *De re aedificatoria* (1452) regarding the means by which the ancients transported and elevated weights and stones. Unlike Colonna, however, Alberti cites his sources:

... it seems necessary here to give some Account in what Manner such huge Bodies are moved, and how they are raised to such high and difficult Places. ... We find in Ammianus Marcellinus the Historian, that an Obelisk was brought from the Nile, in a Vessel of three hundred Oars, and laid upon rollers at three Miles distance from Rome ... And that several thousand Men laboured hard at the erecting it, though the whole Circus was full of nothing but vast Engines and Ropes of a prodigious Thickness.³¹

While he eschews the language of the erudite pedagogue, Colonna has Poliphilo frame his own questions about the obelisk in similar terms:

Cum quale virtute et humane forcie et ordine et incredibile impensa, cum coelestae aemulatione tanto nell’aire tale pondo suggesto riportare? Cum quale ergate et cum quale orbiculate troclee et cum quale capre o polispasio et altre tractorie machine et tramate armature?³²

Poliphilo demonstrates here that he possesses Alberti’s learned skill, not in unravelling the hidden meanings of the form of the obelisk (he requires assistance for that), but in describing step by step the human ingenuity that contributed to such a building. Unlike Alberti, however, Poliphilo leaves these questions of construction suspended in mid-air; he is not writing a treatise after all.

Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria*, like court pageantry literature, sought legitimacy in the vestiges of antiquity. Alberti’s opening claim makes clear his concern both with reconstructing a knowledge of antiquity and with the identity of the architect as an expert: ‘we shall collect and transcribe into this our work, all of the most curious and useful observations left us by the ancients.’³³ Yet Alberti’s piecemeal approach to recovering the architecture of the ancients is vastly different from the drama of the staged spectacle, and Poliphilo’s descriptions of architecture imitate Alberti by privileging a different kind of vision than that which followed the staged pageantry. When Poliphilo speaks of his approach to the obelisk — ‘verso questo aedificamento mirava li gratiosi monticuli della convalle sempre piu levarse, gli quali cum el praelibato aedificio coniuncti vedea’ [‘drawing near the building, I beheld the gracious mountains before afar of seeming small, by coming nearer and nearer, to lift up themselves more and more’] — he makes full use of Alberti’s theory of pyramid vision in which

the perceived object changes in size according to the distance and the position of the observer.³⁴ Even Poliphilo's aesthetics here are derived from Alberti. When he describes the turning device in the image of a nymph — 'cum el vestito volitante, parte delle polpose sure manifestatisse discoperte' ['covered with a habit blown abroad with the wind, and showing part of the naked substance of the legs and thighs'] — he must have followed closely Alberti's lines in his *Della pictura*: 'you will see with what grace the bodies, where they are struck by the wind, show the nude under the draperies in suitable parts.'³⁵ At another point, Colonna cleverly borrows from Alberti's discussion of the nature of different types of wood when he has one of the nymphs explain that the particular branches tied to an ox's skull are made of Larch and Turpentine, two types of wood which are sturdy and enduring; this Albertian technical knowledge allows Poliphilo and the reader to make the meaningful connection between inflammable larchwood and the strength of patience.³⁶ When it comes to the interpretation of these enigmatic symbols, it is craft knowledge of the sort provided by Alberti's treatise which endows the erudition with legitimacy.

Colonna appropriates from Alberti not only the technical language of architecture, but also his impassioned defense of a threatened cultural heritage. At one point Poliphilo is moved to lament the loss of an appropriate language with which to describe the architecture of antiquity:

Non sento tanto in me di sapere che perfectamente la potesse et assai discrivere, praecipuamente che nella nostra aetate gli vernaculi, proprii et patrii vocabuli et di l'arte aedificatoria peculiari sono cum gli veri homini sepulti et extincti. O execrabile et sacrilige barbarie, come hai exspolianda invaso la più nobile parte dil pretioso thesoro et sacraria latino et l'arte, tanto dignificata, al praesente infuscata dal maledicta ignorantia perditamente offensa?³⁷

This hysterical apostrophe alludes to Alberti's own concern with language, which he regarded, like the edifices themselves, as subject to destruction. Interestingly, what led Alberti to propose eloquence and lucidity leads Colonna toward greater obscurity. Hieroglyphs were not intriguing and learned riddles for Alberti; they spoke a visual language that escaped destruction precisely because they appealed to 'ingenious men of all nations' and thus did not depend on the knowledge of a particular language or culture for their survival.³⁸ The fragments of ancient architecture were potential sources of knowledge, and Alberti, like other antiquarians, equated the physical objects with an entire culture. Poliphilo's impassioned descriptions of ancient structures, his praise of the inventive ingenuity and moral rectitude of the architect along with the architect's technological skill and knowledge of craft materials all derive from Alberti's treatise. Colonna clearly draws on these early attempts to create a language with which to describe the material world and art of the ancients, but he ignores Alberti's call for clarity, preferring to deepen the mystery rather than illuminate it.

Colonna's illustrations and dream-tale also owe much to Filarete's *Trattato di Architettura* (1465), a fantastical portfolio of architectural designs presented as a bid for court patronage through the conceit of an ideal city.³⁹ In an extended dialogue with his patron, Filarete self-consciously

³⁴ – Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John Spencer (New Haven, 1966), Book III, p. 48.

³⁵ – Ibid., Book II, p. 81.

³⁶ – Alberti, *TBA*, Bk. II, Ch. VI, p. 29. Also, Pozzi and Ciapponi, *Edizione Commento*, Vol. II, pp. 124–5.

³⁷ – *Hypnerotomachia*, p. 23: 'I do not feel it is within me to describe completely how, above all in our age, the natural language, the appropriate and native vocabulary and the peculiarities of the art of building are like the men themselves, buried and extinct. O impious and plundering barbarians, how could you overrun the most noble part of this precious treasure, the hallowed Latin tongue and such a dignified art, now clouded with cursed ignorance, irrevocably harmed?' Also, Pozzi and Ciapponi, *Edizione Commento*, Vol. II, p. 63.

³⁸ – Alberti, *TBA*, Bk. VIII, Ch. IV, pp. 169–70.

³⁹ – Filarete, Antonio Averlino, *Trattato di Architettura*, 2 vols, ed. and trans. John R. Spenser (New Haven, 1965).

40 – Filarete, Vol. II, Bk XIII, f. 100r: ‘Sir, in gazing upon these beautiful and worthy buildings that they were once in ancient Rome and these hieroglyphs of Egypt, I feel as though I have been reborn in ancient times.’

41 – Filarete, Vol. II, Bk XV, f. 120r: ‘The candelabra were in this manner, decorated in gold and silver, as beautiful as possible. Other ornaments were in the temple. There were lamps attached between each candelabrum. It was as you see from the drawing. I will say no more about this temple, but it is believed that there were many ornaments and many different things built in it. We will now continue with a description of the garden . . .’

42 – Charles Mitchell, p. 493. While centered entirely on reading these works as embryonic forms of modern disciplines which then trail off into mannerist decline, Mitchell is still the best source for tracing the antiquarian trajectory from the notebooks of Cyriaco d’Ancona to Colonna’s romance.

43 – E.W. Bodnar, *Cyriacus of Ancona and Athens* (Brussels, 1960), p. 39. For transcriptions of Cyriaco’s letters, see Ciriaco de Pizzicolli, *Cyriacus of Ancona’s Journeys in the Propontis and the Northern Aegean, 1444–1445*, eds. E. W. Bodnar and Charles Mitchell (Philadelphia, 1976).

44 – Bernard Ashmole, ‘Cyriac of Ancona’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* (London, 1959), p. 28. Phyllis Lehmann also sees Cyriaco as an astute archeologist with an architect’s eye for detail, but she acknowledges that Cyriaco arrived in Greece with his head already filled with Ovid and Pliny — an established framework with which to interpret the meanings embedded in the physical landscape. See Phyllis W. Lehmann, *Samothracian Reflections: Aspects of the Revival of the Antique* (Princeton, 1973).

45 – Cyriaco d’Ancona, Cod. Vat. Lat. 5237, f. 515. Cited in Ashmole, p. 39.

pulls out all stops to promote his expert knowledge about architecture as well as his innovative designs. Filarete knows best how to sell his patron on the *all’antica* fad. At one point he has a visiting Lord exclaim, ‘Signore à me pare vedere di quegli degni edifici ch’erano a Roma antichamente e di quegli che si leggie che in egipto erano. Mi pare rinascere a vedere questi così degni edifici e à me ancora parono begli.’⁴⁰ The intricate drawings in Filarete’s manuscript usually remain unintegrated with the text, but Filarete at times interrupts the narrative to create a space for the illustrations as demonstrations of his skill. As a preface to the illustrations, however, Filarete rushes through in shameless capitalist fashion, without much concern for the act of describing as a reflective skill:

In questo modo stanno candelabri i quali erano hornati doro & dargento I quali erano bellissimi quanto era possibile. Altri hornamenti ancora assai erano in questo tempio erani lampone ataccate a ciascuno candellabro & l’altro & così stanno come qui per questo disegno si puo comprendere. Altro non dire di questo tempio ma e da credere che hornamenti glierà assai & varie cose in esso fatte. Seguita hora come era fatto questo giardino . . .⁴¹

Filarete, unlike Alberti, is not concerned with the emotive effect of these structures except as enticements for the patron. The promotional aspect of Filarete’s treatise and the fantasy go hand in hand as ways of entertaining and soliciting court favor. The *Hypnerotomachia* thus models itself in part on the architectural fantasy as well as on the juxtaposition of verbal descriptions and reproduced images which characterize the layout of Filarete’s treatise. However, the voice of the sensate observer, awed into muteness and shame, belongs to another genre entirely.

When we turn to the print showing the ruins of the ‘Polyandrio’ (figure 1), we recognize what led Charles Mitchell to call the *Hypnerotomachia* ‘the perfect flower and consummation of fifteenth-century antiquarian scholarship’.⁴² Placed alongside Cyriaco’s sketches of Hadrian’s arch in Athens (figure 2), the ‘Polyandrio’ woodcut of broken, suspended arches and scattered debris confirms that the genealogy of the *Hypnerotomachia* rightly begins with this diplomat, merchant traveller, and outdoor scavenger of epigraphs, who filled his notebooks with enough drawings and inscriptions to influence an entire generation of scribes, artists, and antiquarians. Cyriaco described mountains and islands, sketched lively statues, temples, and arches and copied the inscriptions and drawings in letters sent to Leonardo Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini among others.⁴³ Bernard Ashmole, in his admirable attempt to restore Cyriaco’s reputation as a faithful copyist — ‘there is no fantasy; he is all for facts’ — engages in a meticulous comparison of the diverse copies of the *commentaria* to determine where, in the process of successive copying, the Cyriacan fact becomes the disciple’s fancy.⁴⁴ When Ashmole notes that the original Cyriacan drawing makes the figures look like living beings and not like sculpture, he attributes this to poor draughtsmanship, but in a letter to a merchant friend, Cyriaco himself speaks admiringly of a coin intaglio as showing a ‘wonderful expression’ and remarks, ‘truly he seems to show living features from the glistening stone . . . where the breathing limbs are seen to shine’.⁴⁵ We have already noted such praise of deceiving animation in pageantry descriptions, and, in his essay on imitation, Gombrich argued that ‘the illusion of movement and life’ served as one

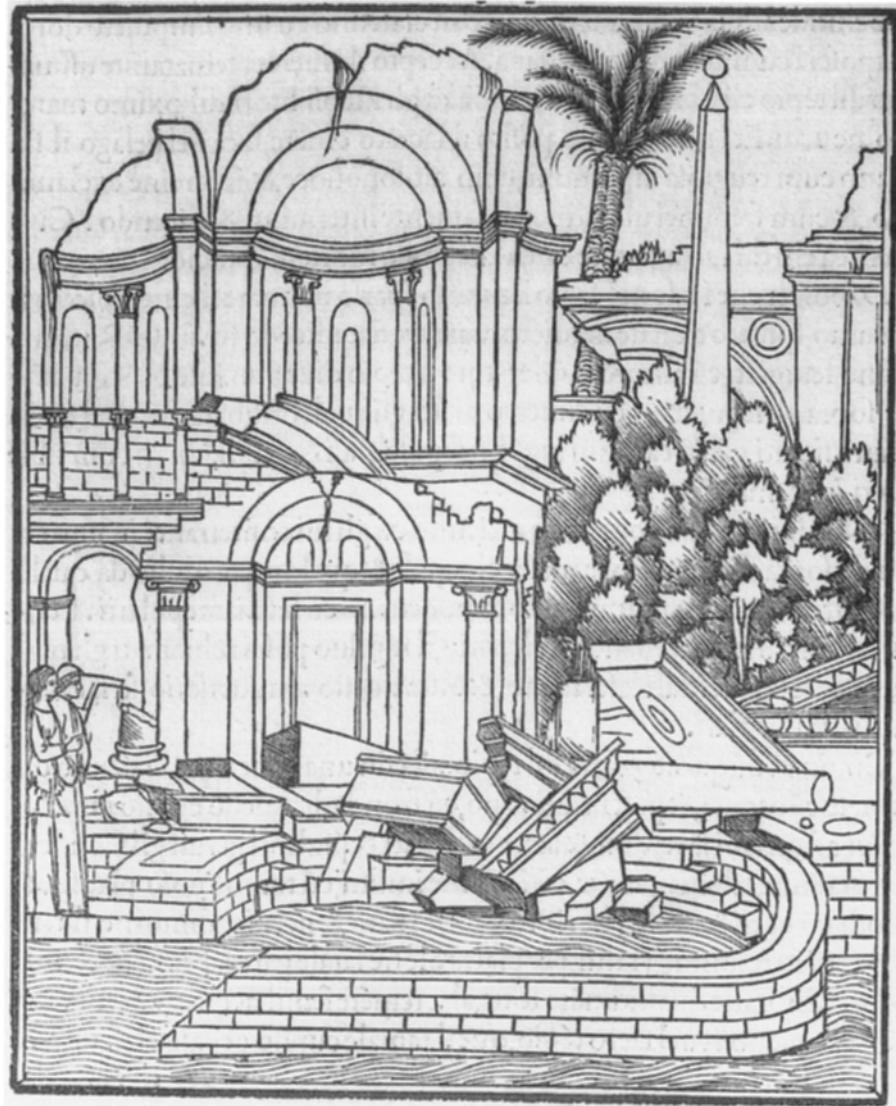


Figure 1. The Ruins of Polyandrio,
Hypnerotomachia Poliphili (Venice, 1499)
(Princeton University Library Kane
Collection).

of the fundamental principals guiding Renaissance artists in the *all'antica* style — an aesthetic that matched the expressed moral project of epigraphic transcribers.⁴⁶

Later epigraphic transcribers borrowed from copies of Cyriaco's scattered notebooks for their own collections of ancient inscriptions. Before turning to one of these collections, we should note that the high degree of artistry evidenced in the Cyriacan site drawings may have contributed to the formation of the genre of the artist's sketchbook, as yet inchoate in the fifteenth century. Indeed, Patricia Fortini Brown has argued persuasively for the connection between antiquarian archaeology and art, suggesting that Jacopo Bellini was inspired by the Cyriacan notebooks to put together his own album of drawings.⁴⁷ Although we do not really know how the Cyriacan notebooks were organized, except on the small scale of the Hamilton manuscript in Berlin, the drawings in Cyriaco's *commentaria* do depend on a travel itinerary and eye-witness account in a way that distinguishes Cyriaco's collection from Bellini's randomly compiled reper-

⁴⁶ – Ernst Gombrich, 'The Style all'antica: Imitation and Assimilation', *Gombrich on the Renaissance*, Vol. 1: *Norm and Form* (London, 1993), p. 128. Marcanova's dedication to Malatesta claims that the collection of inscriptions and epigraphs is not only a private mission to preserve that which age has threatened to destroy forever, but that these inscriptions themselves bestow immortality upon that which is clearly mortal; the *sylloge* thus resurrects both the beings, long since buried, whose names are preserved in etched stone and the letters themselves as objects worthy of study.

⁴⁷ – Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past* (Yale, 1996), pp. 353–74.

Figure 2. Hadrian's Arch, *Commentaria*,
(Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Hamilton MS
254, f. 85v).



toire of artistic motifs. Many of the inscriptions and drawings within the collection provided artistic motifs and aesthetic ideas for *all'antica* paintings and contemporary public sculpture; yet it is the antiquarian *sylloge* which models itself primarily on the peregrinations of the Cyriacan *commentaria* and the *sylloge* privileges the site even as it gathers to itself the artistic designs and fragmented forms with which to embellish the inscriptions. With his acute sense of antiquity's literal place in the contemporary world, Cyriaco set a standard for antiquarian scholarship. The topographically organized *sylloge* models itself after the Cyriacan *commentaria* by uncovering an indigenous past traced through familiar territory.

One of the most stunning examples of these antiquarian *syllogai* is the *Quaedam antiquitatum fragmenta*, a deluxe manuscript compiled in 1465 by

the Paduan humanist and doctor, Giovanni Marcanova.⁴⁸ The Marcanova manuscript explicitly borrows from the Cyriacan *commentaria* and seems to constitute the closest archetype for the illustrations and narrative guidance which we find in the *Hypnerotomachia*. Marcanova's strange juxtaposition between a cohesive, yet anachronistic — ‘in situ’ — recreation of antiquity and the scattered and cracked relics, altars and epigraphs adorning the rest of the work finds its way into the pages of Colonna’s romance where epigraphic inscriptions are displayed as found objects, and where Poliphilo, our contemporary guide, occupies the space of a mythological and *all’antica* past. In order to characterize the form of guidance offered by the *Hypnerotomachia* and its own dependence on epigraphic literature, we need first to draw out the distinctive elements of this antiquarian *sylloge*.

First, the *sylloge* serves as a guide to a visually accessible antiquity. Marcanova’s manuscript opens with an album of 15 pen and ink drawings depicting Roman locations and monuments. Military processions, religious ceremonies and public spectacles are all framed within the urban topography of ancient Rome. The illustrations seem to reflect a variety of interests, an intriguing mixture of pedagogy, inventive artistry, and anthropology. What appears to be the Pantheon is squeezed to the width of the tower of Pisa and occupies the center of the marketplace of the Forum, enlivened by the figures in contemporary clothes who sell and barter their baskets of poultry, game, and fruit (figure 3). The shy bather peeking out from the Baths of Diocletian marks the entrance while two buckets, drawn along a pulley, illustrate how water was transported into the bath (figure 4). The illustration of the Colosseum is clearly meant to draw the viewer’s attention to the ancient use of the structure as a place for courtly and theatrical performances (figure 5). Rather than attempting to capture the quotidian habits of the ancient city for their own sake, the drawings focus on evoking a lively and fanciful setting for the architectural structures whose names were familiar to all. The drawings also offer a coherent, albeit whimsical, context for the inscriptions which constitute the bulk of the manuscript.

The contemporary reader is invited to acknowledge the original function of each edifice by attending to the internal guides who point at obelisks and step out of doorways. In each of the drawings we can make out inscriptions which the reader could then look up in the alphabetical index of epigrams at the end of the manuscript; yet for the most part, the inscriptions within the drawings — such as ‘Arcus Triumphalis,’ ‘Sacrificium’ and ‘Tarpea’ — serve as aids to facilitate identification of the structure or scene represented. The variety of audience gestures in the Colosseum seems to encompass the full range of conventional poses found throughout Quattrocento paintings. One wonders if the Marcanova artist took heed of Alberti’s prescriptions in his *Della pictura*, when he remarked, ‘a painting in which there are bodies in many dissimilar poses is always especially pleasing . . . to each one is given his own action and flection of members.’⁴⁹ The two women with their hands placed across their stomachs are not nauseated with worry; they are merely acting the part of decorous maidens as the 1471 etiquette manual, *Decor pueriarum*, advises: ‘et così stando et andando sempre cum la mano dextra sopra la sinistra, al mezo del cenze nostro davanti.’⁵⁰ These drawings, then, do not strive for a

48 – *Quaedam antiquitatum fragmenta* (Padua, 1465), Princeton University Library MS Garrett 158. The Garrett MS was probably intended for Costanza Sforza in 1473. Sforza’s impresa and motto can be found on f. 144v. See H. van M. Dennis III, ‘The Garrett Manuscript of Marcanova’, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, vi, 1927, pp. 113–26. Also, see Charles Mitchell, ‘Felice Feliciano Antiquarius’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xlvi, (1961), pp. 197–221.

49 – Alberti, *On Painting*, Bk. II, p. 76.

50 – *Decor Pueriarum* (Venice, 1473): ‘and so standing and walking always keep the right hand over the left and in front of the middle of the waist’. Cited in Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford, 1972), p. 70.

Figure 3. The Marketplace, *Quaedam antiquitatum fragmenta* (Padua, 1465)
(Princeton University Library MS Garrett 158, f. 4r.)



classicizing distance; they render the ancient city in a contemporary artistic idiom.

Marcanova pulls from both ancient and contemporary sources to fill his *sylloge* with a bewildering variety of inscriptions, but one source in particular may be worth noting. In Poggio's famous reflection on the ruins of Rome in the first book of his *De varietate fortunae* (1431–48), his companion, Antonio Lusco, characterizes the city as the fount of an entire culture and laments the ruins of 'hanc urbem . . . ex qua rei militaris disciplina, morum sanctimonia et vitae, sanctiones legum, virtutum omnium exempla et bene vivendi ratio defluxerant'.⁵¹ Almost as a corrective to this despair, Poggio affirms the expertise of reading age-worn inscriptions as a source

51 – Poggio Bracciolini, *De varietate fortunae*, ed. Outi Merisalo (Helsinki, 1993), p. 92: '[this] city from which flowed military discipline, purity of morals and life, the decrees of laws, the models of all virtues, and the knowledge of right living'.



Figure 4. The Baths of Diocletian, *Quaedam antiquitatum fragmenta* (Padua, 1465) (Princeton University Library MS Garrett 158, f. 7v).

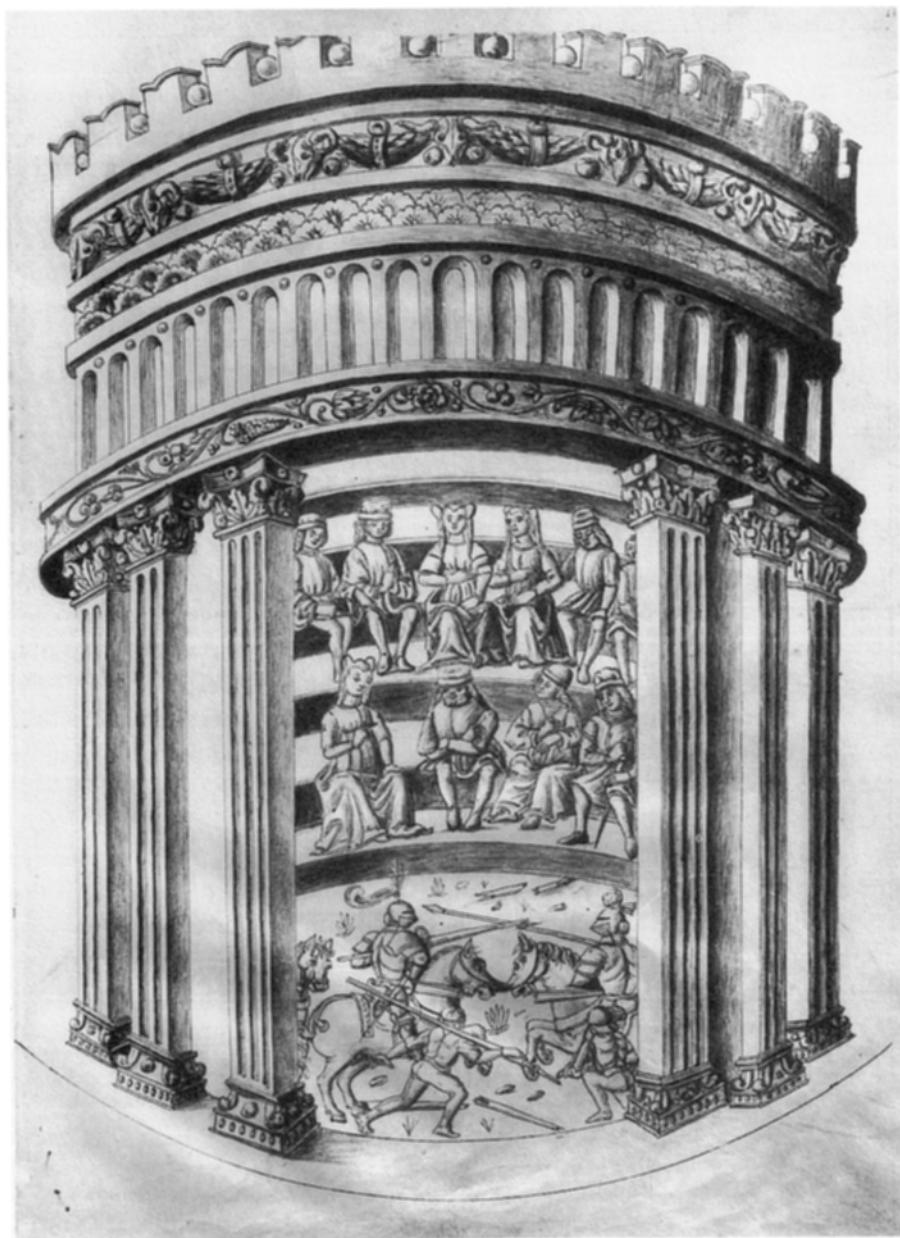
for dating antique edifices and thus for achieving a more preserving and intact picture of the ancient city:

Extant in Capitolio fornices duplice ordine novis inserti edificiis publici nunc salis receptaculum, in quibus sculptum est litteris vetustissimis atque admodum humore salis excessis, Q. Lutatium .Q. F et .Q. Catulum coss. substructionem et tabularium de suo faciendum coeravisse, opus ipsa vetustate venerandum.⁵²

Poggio's expertise in reading letters and buildings thus allows him to forge a thoroughfare from the present to the past. When he traces the word 'Cimbron' to the Cimbrian spoils of Marius, Poggio offers language as

⁵² – Poggio Bracciolini, *De varietate fortunae*, p. 93: 'there survive on the Capitoline the double tier of arcades set into a new building, now a receptacle of the public salt, on which is written in very ancient letters, greatly corroded by the moisture of the salt, that Q. Lutatius, Q. F., and Q. Catulus, the consuls, had charge of making the substructure'.

Figure 5. The Colosseum, *Quaedam antiquitatum fragmenta* (Padua, 1465) (Princeton University Library MS Garrett 158, f. 11r).



53 – Poggio Bracciolini, *ibid.* We should note the way that Poggio sets up the dialogue as a challenge to Petrarch and he makes sure that he has the final word in championing the innovative tools created by antiquarians in evoking an accurate portrait of the past in the present. Petrarch, whom Poggio refers to as ‘doctissimus vir’, did not make use of the inscriptions.

another kind of evidence for uncovering (or deriving) ancient material culture.⁵³ However wistful and disheartened he may appear in the work, Poggio — like Alberti — borrows and displays with confidence the manifold skills available to the writer who wishes to compare antiquity with the present.

If we return to Marcanova’s *sylloge* of inscriptions, we find there the same attention as in Poggio’s literary exercise to the specific location of each inscription. The repetition of ‘dextere late,’ ‘apud’ and ‘in eodem loco’ act as constant verbal markers of the spatial context. There is also the same attention paid to the way in which the contemporary structures become guides to disclosing the surviving forms of the ancient world. Many inscriptions are prefaced with an abbreviated history of each site, a brief description of what used to be there and what has replaced it in

the present. The condition of the object — recalling Poggio's salt-worn stones — is rendered again and again with the simple remark, 'lapis fractus est.' Many of the illustrated inscriptions and sepulchral monuments are presented in their fragmented, already found state, that is, as ruined and tantalizingly incomplete. Marcanova, like Poggio, uses etymologies to identify monuments and edifices and the work often cites the vulgar name alongside the classical. The form of guidance offered by the *Hypnerotomachia* owes much to this epigraphic literature which emphasizes the topography of antiquity as an organizing framework. Poliphilo moves through antiquity as a pilgrim and the woodcut images serve as souvenirs of the places he encounters along the way. Moreover, like Poggio and Marcanova, Colonna presents himself as an expert who can interpret and convey the landscape and language of the past, however fanciful.

While the desire to preserve the past seems to constitute the motivating spirit of antiquarian collectors throughout the fifteenth century, the relationship between the Marcanova collection of inscriptions and Poggio's comments on the ruins of Rome also suggests that the *sylloge* could serve as a creative source-book, a kind of *florilegium* for both rhetorical exercises and artistic designs. The woodcut images in the *Hypnerotomachia* may also have fulfilled the same function. Most of the inscriptions from the Marcanova *sylloge* are themselves culled from literary sources; and a collection in which sepulcher monuments to Lucretia and Ovid rest on the same pages as the historical epitaphs of Roman consuls thus presents us with an ancient world half-researched and half-invented.⁵⁴

Cyriaco's ebullient and spirited descriptions, while expressing wonder and awe, do not articulate the unstable longing expressed throughout the Marcanova *sylloge*. The romanticism which infuses Marcanova's manuscript makes it clear that this is not a compendium of documentary sources for sober scholarship. In describing the condition, location and purpose of the epigraphs and monuments, the narrator often figures himself as an effusively emotional guide who leads us through the ruins and reproduces the illustrations as the act of an awed supplicant. In describing the human figures on two capitals, he writes:

... quae ego ad instar illorum calamo hic describere aut pingere non audeo
tamen precepto et iusu illius qui mihi ad sui beneplacitum imperare potest:
et cuius preceptis semper paratus existo: ut ingenium debile meum attingeret
de his poterit hic tremula manus veluti indignus tanti operis calamo
designabo.⁵⁵

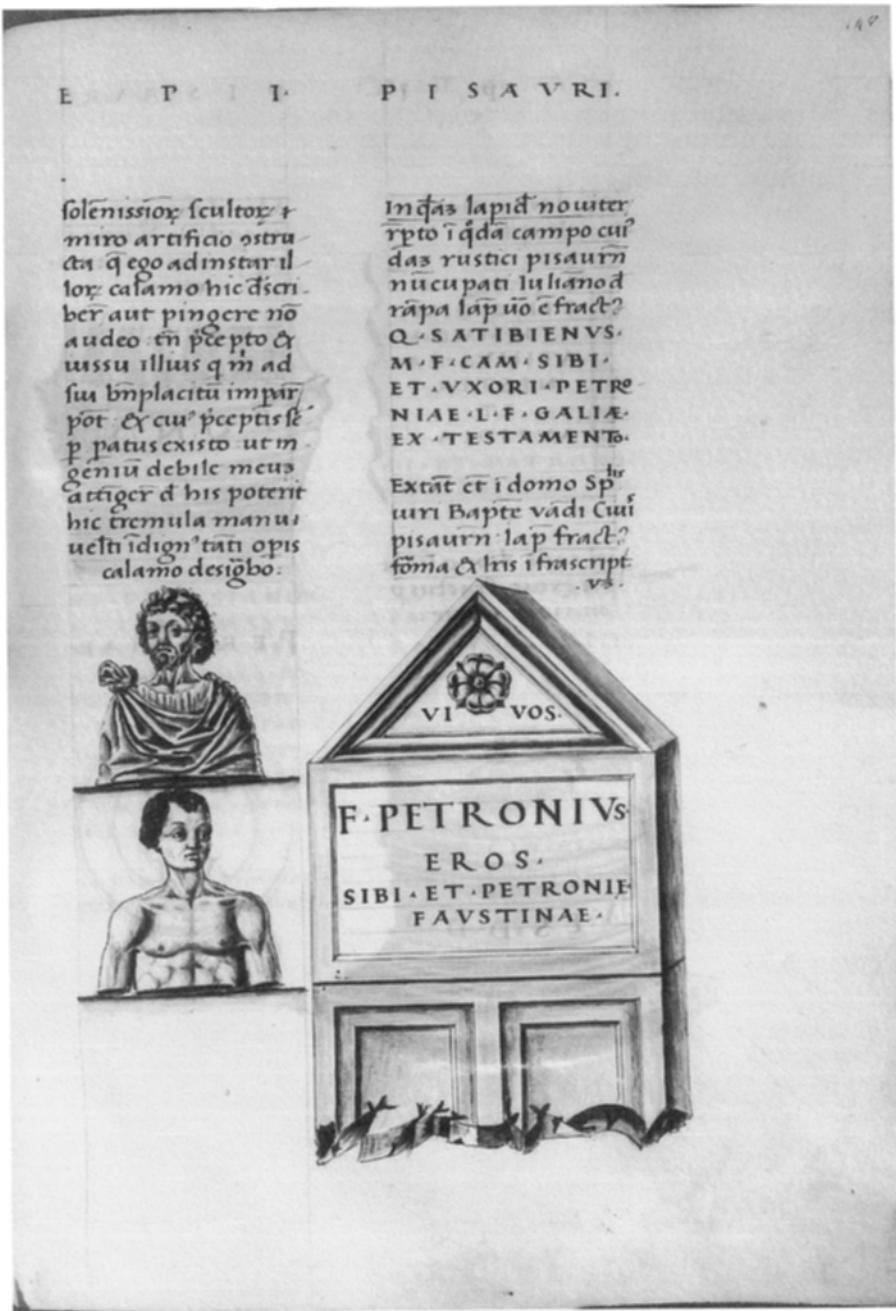
And so, with a less tremulous hand, there follow two drawings of the sculpted figures in the Cyriacan manner (figure 6). The *sylloge* thus offers itself as both an artistic and literary source book, but it does so through the conceit of the antiquarian as passionate spectator.

We must be attentive to the way the form itself determines the expression of antiquity contained within the epigraphic literature. What happens to the relationship between text and image when we move from Marcanova's *sylloge* to the illustrated printed book of the *Hypnerotomachia*? For one thing, the physical page can no longer bear witness to the trembling hands that immediately sketch what is before the eyes of the witness. Poliphilo could not very well claim that he carved and printed his illustrations on the spot.

⁵⁴ – Interestingly, the reader of inscriptions who noted a source from Livy by citing the book and chapter in the margin [MS Garrett, f. 47r] seems to us far more preoccupied with the literary correspondences of the *sylloge* than with the geography of the inscriptions themselves.

⁵⁵ – Garrett MS, f. 148r: 'as an image of them, I do not here dare to describe or draw with a pen; nonetheless, by the precept and instruction of the one who may order me at his pleasure and whose commands I always stand ready to obey: and so that my trembling hand and my weak intellect might try to deal with these matters, as one unworthy of such a work, just so I will draw with my pen'.

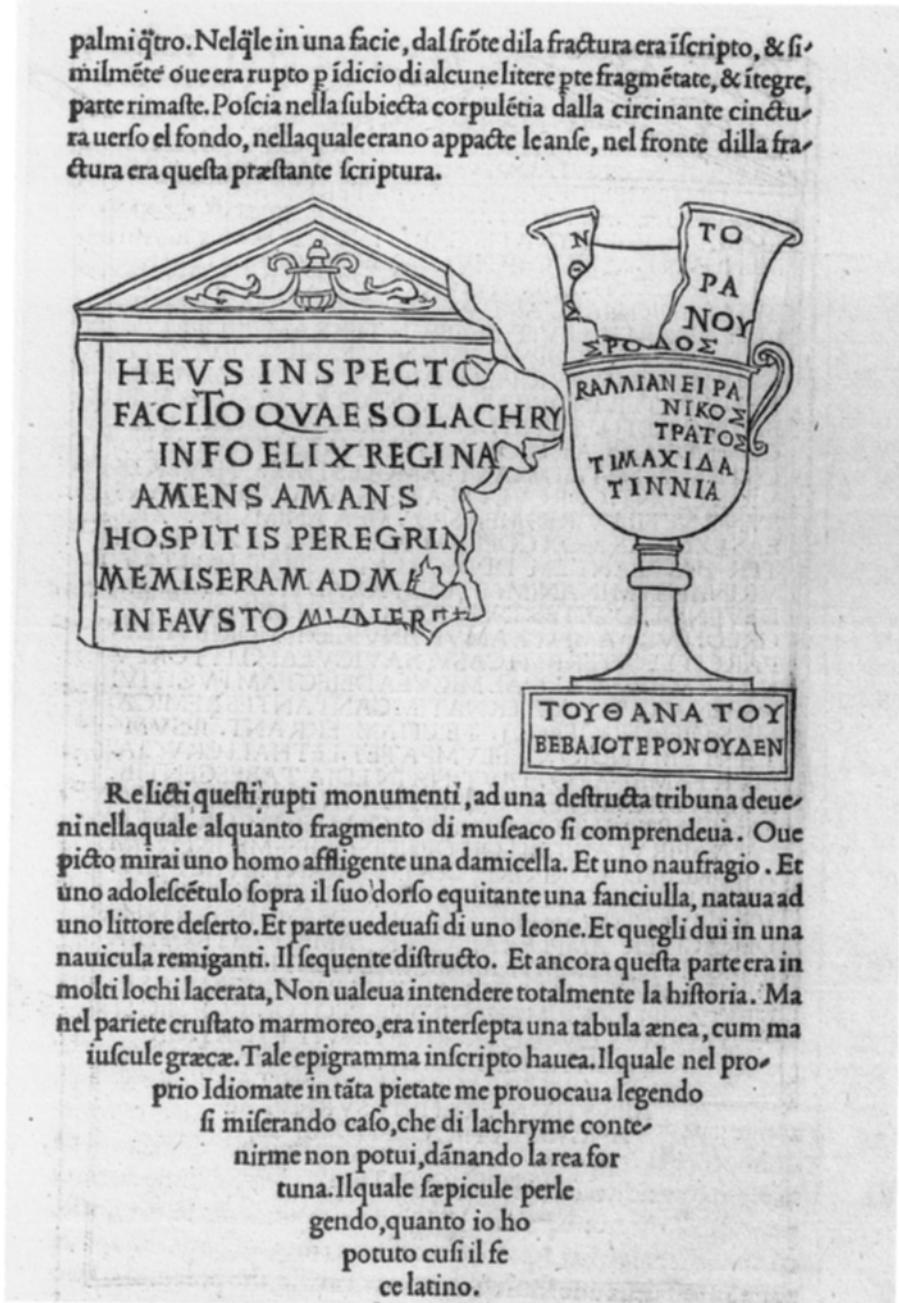
Figure 6. *Quaedam antiquitatum fragmenta*
(Padua, 1465) (Princeton University
Library MS Garrett 158, f. 148r).



The notion of antiquarian as guide and witness also becomes a more firmly fixed poetic conceit. The Marcanova *sylloge* is an extremely mediated attempt to create a skilled and evocative guidebook through the geography of relics, but it is not entirely a romance. Nevertheless, the willful artifice and attention to the subjective response of the antiquarian which informs both the Cyriacan *commentaria* and Marcanova's *sylloge* had a decisive influence on the form of guidance and interpretation of antiquity within the *Hypnerotomachia*.

When we return to the description of the Polyandrian landscape, where Poliphilo reads sepulchral inscriptions telling the stories of doomed lovers, it is clear that the series of accompanying woodcut prints borrows directly

Figure 7. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499) (Princeton University Library Kane Collection).



from the Cyriacan and Marcanova models. The layout schema of the *Hypnerotomachia* presents the sepulchers, altars and monument relics as if sketched on site, without the borders reserved for the narrative prints (figure 7). These *Hypnerotomachia* prints mimic almost exactly the Marcanova drawings (figure 8). The verbal and visual division of large structures into constituent panels or sections, which we see in both the Marcanova drawings and the Cyriacan sketches, is repeated throughout the *Hypnerotomachia* as Poliphilo, like Marcanova, tries to capture in description all the dimensions of the edifices and statues he encounters.

In the Polyandrian episode, Colonna borrows from both Virgil and Dante, but here there are no shades; the altars and sepulchers speak their

Figure 8. *Quaedam antiquitatum fragmenta*
(Padua, 1465) (Princeton University
Library MS Garrett 158, f. 148v).



own stories of love and suicide through inscriptions which, like those in Marcanova, call out to the passerby — ‘viator’ — or the occasional ‘lector’ to delay and read their well-crafted tales. The literary dependence on Virgil and Dante is suggestive, especially when we consider these genres as guides to antiquity, and the *Hypnerotomachia*, in particular, as a dream experience which models itself on Aeneas’s passage to the underworld and Dante’s escorted descent. Poliphilo’s fevered response to the relics also matches that of the Marcanova narrator:

Ma nel pariete crustato marmoreo era intersepta una tabula aenea, cum maiuscule graecae: tale epigramma inscripto havea. Il quale, nel proprio

idiomate, in tanta pietate me provocava legendo sì miserando caso, che di lachryme contenirme non potui, damnando la rea Fortuna. Il quale saepicule perlegendi, quanto io ho potuto cusi il fece latino.⁵⁶

Poliphilo's errant wonder in the face of these ancient monuments and his amorous desire derive from the early Quattrocento conception of the antiquarian as an impassioned and aimless lover. We are reminded of the famous Greek scholar, Chrysoloras, gazing in 1411 at the destroyed monuments of ancient Rome: 'And so, walking through the city, one's eyes are drawn from one work to another, just as lovers never have their fill of wondering at the living beauties and gazing intently at them.'⁵⁷ Unlike the *sylloge*, the romance tale heightens the antiquarian wandering into a more subjective and symbolic activity, and as a printed book, the emphasis on Poliphilo's ability to decipher and describe the ruins replaces Marcanova's expressed concern about whether he can reproduce an image of the object in the manuscript with his own hand. Unlike the Marcanova *sylloge*, when Poliphilo refers to the objects and interrupts his descriptions to allow for the visual representation, there is no explicit connection between Poliphilo as both narrator of his dream and designer of the printed illustrations. Perhaps this distinction is what allows Colonna to claim that his work is heaven-sent rather than acquired through the toil of an on-the-site scavenger.

The *Hypnerotomachia* aggrandizes the figure of the guide as interpreter of an increasingly recondite antiquity, suggesting a more élitist framework for the interpretation of this material world than we find in the Cyriacan notebooks and *sylloge*. Although one could argue that the first-person romance narrative popularizes antiquarian scholarship through a playful engagement with the epigraphic material, we should at least acknowledge a qualitative shift in the way the visual world of antiquity is presented in this transition from collection to romance. There were no hieroglyphs in Marcanova's *sylloge* and there was no sense that these inscriptions required anything more than an appendix to unravel.⁵⁸ The *sylloge* is also an explicitly collaborative effort not only in its dependence on multiple collectors like Cyriaco, Poggio and Felice Feliciano, but also in its expectation of further additions and new discoveries, thus suggesting an open-endedness which Colonna's romance does not permit.⁵⁹ Marcanova's guidance thus frames rather than determines the inscriptions by structuring them regionally and in relation to their immediate physical surroundings. While Poliphilo also notes the physical condition of altars and sepulchers and admires the skill and artifice of the objects, his is a journey through an illusionary and thematically allusive space rather than a subjectively guided reproduction of inscriptions found in the cities and countryside of Perugia or Verona.

Corroboration, both materially and through textual sources, is still possible within the Marcanova *sylloge*, even if one would be hard-pressed to ascertain whether a sarcophagus inscribed in Latin rests at the apex of Mt Olympus, as one drawing in the manuscript attests. The *Hypnerotomachia* closes itself off from any possibility of documentary correspondence. The inscriptions are meant to resonate within the context of the larger romance narrative and Poliphilo interprets each epigraph as a romance in itself, a story which mirrors his own status as lover. Marcanova's *sylloge* explicitly

56 – *Hypnerotomachia*, p. 251: 'But in the middle of the marble-embossed wall there was placed a bronze tablet, with capital letters in Greek: there was an inscribed epigram which, in its own idiom, excited within me a profound pity while reading such a mournful tale, that I couldn't hold back the tears, cursing Fortune all the while. Reading this text again and again, as much as I could I represented the Latin.'

57 – C. Smith, *Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism* (New York and Oxford, 1992), pp. 199–215.

58 – I do not want to understate the fantastical elements of the Marcanova *sylloge*, but I do wish to stress its invitation to a particular kind of guided reading and the aids which it offers for that end. One reader of the Garrett MS obviously ignored the appendix list of inscriptions and inventively transformed the inscribed epitaph of Caesar on a Roman arch into an alliterative lament: 'Pater Patriae Profectus est: Secum Salus Sublata est: Veni Victor: Validus: Vici Vires Vrbis Vester: Ferro: Fame: Flamma: Frigore.'

59 – I am informed here by Anthony Grafton's parallels between the collaborative nature of Schedel's *Chronica* and the antiquarian *sylloge* in his March 26, 1996 unpublished lecture, 'Representing time and space in Renaissance Nuremberg: Hartmann Schedel's *Chronicle*'.

60 – Great attention has been devoted to the influence of the *Hypnerotomachia*'s woodcut designs on sixteenth-century artists and architects, but the stylistic parallels with early and contemporary productions have not been the subject of widespread study. For sixteenth-century influences, see Anthony Blunt, 'The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* in Seventeenth-Century France', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 1 (1937) and E. Gombrich, 'Hypnerotomachiana', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 14 (1951). For a more recent study, see again Helena Szepe's *The Poliphilo and other Aldines Reconsidered in the Context of the Production of Decorated Books in Venice* (unpublished Cornell dissertation, 1991).

61 – Cited in C. F. Buhler, *The Fifteenth-Century Book* (Philadelphia, 1960), p. 93: 'In my art they just don't do anything anymore—my art is over for the love of books which are made in such a way that we cannot paint in miniature any more.'

62 – Peter Parshall and David Landau, *The Renaissance Print: 1470–1550* (New Haven, 1995), pp. 34–5.

63 – Ibid., p. 35 and Hind, *An Introduction to a History of Woodcut* (London, 1935), p. 163.

64 – Lehmann, pp. 14–15. For examples of standard frontispiece designs, such as the 1471 hand-illuminated Venetian book of Cicero's *Orations*, which shows a series of oxen remarkably similar to the reliefs on the Propylon frieze, see *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illuminations 1450–1550*, ed. Jonathan Alexander (London, 1994), p. 80. Most of these frontispieces represent a visual hyper-copia of objects crowded together; along with the oxen, we find shields, antique coins, sphinxes and armor-plates (serving as vases for arrows) all hanging like ornaments strung on a charm necklace.

65 – *Hypnerotomachia*, p. 33. For a breakdown of these hieroglyphs, see Vol. II, pp. 68–9.

66 – Erik Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and its Hieroglyphs in European Tradition* (Copenhagen, 1961), p. 66.

dedicates itself to the restorative project of antiquarianism. Poliphilo also regrets the ruined state of antiquity, but by now the ruination is obviously part of the frozen charm of the Polyandrian realm. Unlike the Marcanova *sylloge*, the *Hypnerotomachia* refuses to elide the space between ruins and modern life.

The movement from the illustrated manuscript to the printed book again raises the issue of expertise and craftsmanship and ties in with the praise of technical mastery and innovative design which we find in Poliphilo's ekphrastic descriptions throughout the *Hypnerotomachia*. While the orthography and drawings in Marcanova's *sylloge* are meant to be admired, the sophisticated woodcut prints in the *Hypnerotomachia* are advertisements for a newly emerging craft.⁶⁰ The growing popularity of woodcut illustrations toward the end of the fifteenth century was not a cause for celebration for Bernardino di Michelangelo Cingnoni, a Sienese miniaturist who lamented the perceived decline of his art in 1491: 'Pell'arte mia non si fa piu niente — Pell'arte mia e finita per l'amore de' libri, che si fanno in forma che non si miniano piu.'⁶¹ Given the burgeoning art of woodcut illustrations toward the end of the fifteenth century, we should not discount the possibility that the *Hypnerotomachia* is not only conceptually and typographically influenced by the antiquarian *sylloge* manuscript, but also, perhaps, in direct competition with it. The 1486 publication of Breydenbach's elaborate pilgrimage guidebook, *Peregrinationes in Terram Sanctam*, provided the stimulus for the demand for more exacting and inventive woodcut prints in the north.⁶² Once in Venice, one of the most active centers for book publishing, wood sculptors and intarsia makers rapidly outstripped and replaced illuminators who had previously dominated the decoration of printed works.⁶³

Woodcut designs, however, often followed the conventions of illuminated books. Late fifteenth-century illuminated and woodcut editions shared a visual vocabulary of classical Greek, Roman and Egyptian motifs and emblems which had been in circulation for many decades. The 'garlanded heads of oxen' which Cyriaco found on a Samothracian frieze and noted in his 1444 *commentaria* became standard motifs in late Quattrocento *all'an-tica* frontispiece illuminations.⁶⁴ More than half a century after Cyriaco's drawing, this same emblem appears as a hieroglyph in the *Hypnerotomachia* where Poliphili describes it as an 'osso cornato da bove cum dui instrumenti agricultorii alle corne innodati' symbolizing 'ex labore'.⁶⁵ One need not trace a resolute line of influence and appropriation to recognize these hieroglyphs as deriving from a common stock of decorative motifs. Such hieroglyphs were initially incorporated into artistic representations as decorative elements without any special emphasis on their exoticism or antiquity.⁶⁶

In illuminations and woodcuts of the 1470s and 1480s, then, the ornamental often overrides the oracular nature of the motifs. In the *Hypnerotomachia*, however, the ornamental becomes explicitly enigmatic and authoritative. Poliphilo praises the aesthetic scaffolding of the works and the sheer human *invenzione* that can transform a box-tree into the shape of a peacock and he is fascinated by the cost of materials and the labor involved in creating these works; yet at the same time he makes these objects resonate by embedding them within the larger structure of his

romantic and symbolic journey. When Erik Iversen argues that in the Renaissance, ‘form without content was craftsmanship, and an unphilosophical approach to art vulgar,’ we should ask how craftsmanship could be elevated to compete with the philosophical.⁶⁷ That woodcut prints were beginning to replace illuminations and attain a greater level of sophistification might suggest a way of reading the *Hypnerotomachia* as a bid for the superiority of the art itself — a way of demonstrating its capacity to mimic and surpass the decorative ornaments and designs of illuminated works.

67 – Ibid., p. 78.

I would argue that the development of new technical skills in architecture, theatrical engineering, archaeology, and textual scholarship cannot be separated from the development of an appropriate and eloquent language for interpreting and describing these skills. I suppose one could argue that Poliphilo’s overwrought concern with the loss or absence of explanatory power in conveying the visual experience of an imagined antiquity reflects an anxiety about the accessibility of the ancient past. Poliphilo’s sighs would thus evoke the romanticized bewilderment of the real antiquarian scholar, faced with the works of antiquity as an unreadable landscape or as a hieroglyph in need of decoding, but without the aid of gentle nymphs. This somewhat Bloomian interpretation does capture the obvious difficulties in the antiquarian endeavor, but it should not efface the fact that ‘antiquity’ was fast becoming a usable symbolic world within fifteenth-century court culture. The humanist concept of imitation reflected a confidence in rather than an anxiety about the creative power to emulate and surpass the literary and artistic models of the past. Poliphilo may break out into Petrarchan laments, but he also presents himself as the consummate Albertian appraiser of architecture, asking the right questions about past creations, both in terms of intellectual motive and applied mechanics.

What is fascinating about drawing out some of the manifold archetypes for the *Hypnerotomachia* is that they ultimately reveal the wide range of choices for describing and interpreting the visual world of a reconstructed antiquity. As Poliphilo wanders through his dreamscape, he articulates the gaping wonder and dilating description that characterized contemporary descriptions of mytho-poetic court pageantry. Elsewhere his technical breakdown of architectural structures aims at providing concrete information about the tangible and visible world of antiquity. Poliphilo’s Petrarchan subjectivity centers on the emotional responsiveness which was an intrinsic part of the antiquarian interpretation of that world, yet he also responds to buildings as the pragmatic systematizing Albertian architect and to epigraphs as an enthusiastic Cyriacan antiquarian who records and copies down the inscriptions and material sites of antiquity for others to decipher and enjoy. Yet before anyone begins to believe this romance is the masterful work of an intellectually ambidextrous humanist, I would argue that these identities do not emerge through the protean powers of the author. The transparent mimicry at times begs the question of parody, which is one way of interpreting those passages which strike us as abysmally bad imitations of Petrarch or Boccaccio. Poliphilo’s praise of Polia begins with her fair neck, ‘più candida che la scythia neve’ [‘more white than Scythian snow’], then moves on to her fair head, the rest of her yellow hair, her forehead and rounds it off with the mind-numbingly minute

68 – *Hypnerotomachia*, pp. 136–7.

69 – Alberti, *On Painting*, Bk I, p. 49. And in his treatise on architecture, Alberti writes: ‘For my design is to speak of these things not as a mathematician, but like a workman’, TBA, Bk. VI, Ch. VII, p. 121. Panofsky argued that this period witnessed a phase of decompartmentalization between the study of literature and the study of nature and between intellectual and manual activity. I would like to suggest that the rise of the connoisseur was accompanied by a multiplicity of specific languages denoting discrete skills and that no one identity could fuse all forms of knowledge. See Erwin Panofsky, ‘Artist, scientist, genius; notes on the Renaissance-Dammerung’, *The Renaissance, A Symposium, Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 1952, pp. 77–93.

70 – *Hypnerotomachia*, p. xiii. ‘if the dignified homily and the nicely mixed knowledge are not to your taste, look at the ancient figures in shapes which cost little’.

71 – I wish to thank Anthony Grafton for introducing me to fifteenth-century antiquarianism and for his generous comments and recommendations on this paper. I am also very grateful to the expert and patient staff of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at Princeton’s Firestone Library, particularly Don Skemer and Bill Stoneman.

observation: ‘sotto al disteso naso una lepidissima vallecula alla piciola bucca’ [‘under her nose to her lips, passed a little valley to her mouth’].⁶⁸ As Poliphilo switches back and forth from objective analysis to subjective exposure, from narration to dilating description, he often strikes us as an intellectual and artistic omnivore who may have bitten off more than he could chew.

Exploring these archetypes in the end allows us to perceive how much the work functions as a self-consciously staged performance literally capitalizing on the professional skills emerging during this period and their required languages of expertise. At a time when certain specialized crafts were promoting themselves as artistic creations, the compartmentalization of expertise which led Alberti to claim ‘I speak here as a painter’ (but elsewhere as an architect) required an interpreter and describer capable of mastering the appropriate languages.⁶⁹ In the rhymed preface to the first edition, the concealed author tells the reader, ‘se ’l sermon grave e scientia ben composta/Non ti gustasse, guarda le figure/Vetuste, in geometria che poco costa.’⁷⁰ In the end, this verbal and visual polyglot may reflect a deliberate strategy to appeal to multiple interests. And it was not a bad investment for Crasso after all; where it failed as literature, it succeeded as art.⁷¹