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Baroque Antiquity: Archaeological Imagination in Early Modern Europe

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In 1610 Giacomo Lauro announced a vast encyclopedia on all aspects of antiquity, a *Roma Nova* on the life, religion, rituals, customs, and especially the monuments of the ancients. It was called *Antiquae Urbis Splendor* and came out in four volumes between 1613 and 1628. Lauro, a print and map maker of slender prior success, a clumsy draftsman, a bystander in the world of classical erudition, nevertheless bravely charged into a field dominated by antiquarian giants like Raphael, the Sangallos, Peruzzi, Serlio, Palladio, and publishers like Dupérac. Pirro Ligorio was his god and many of his reconstructions are lifted from the great Ligorio map of 1561. A genial impostor, Lauro had a formula for success in publishing. It involved eclectic plagiarism from sixteenth-century prints and emblem books or, as Tschudi puts it, “instant archeology, an antiquity that would sell and appeared striking” (2f.). Lauro gave his enterprise ballast with a Platner-Ashby-like compendium of ancient texts, which were there for the taking in the popular Renaissance antiquarians. He enlisted the help of an antiquity-minded Swiss Guard, Hans Gros or Giovanni Alto, and a learned Portuguese Jesuit from Goa, André Bayam.

The prints of the ancient Capitolium and Janiculum show Lauro’s procedure: cram in everything ever mentioned in ancient texts, waste no time on research, spout lists of monuments with no notion of physical space, make the temples look like Christian basilicas, and imagine the great baths as though Palladio had never existed. The strategy worked. The print-loving public was ready to buy as long as the content was true-seeming, conceived with flair, and unimaginably grand. Lauro eventually found patrons among the Farnese, the Savoy and the royal house of Poland who saw their own glory reflected in his ungrounded imaginings. He kept an *album amicorum* with letters from the great and the good which Thomas Ashby, founder of Lauro studies, acquired a century ago for the British School at Rome.

Tschudi has examined forty copies of Lauro for this extremely well researched book. He has immersed himself not only in the Renaissance antiquarian texts but also in the literature on the highly competitive Roman print industry. There are remarkable insights at every turn. For example, in his discussion of papal privilege, which usually lasted a decade, he reminds us to look for the influence of one print on another not right away but only when the privilege has expired. The theme, in a nutshell, is that blatant plagiarism, raised to the pitch of creativity and drenched in allegorical morality and Christian teleology, can not only capture the public but feed back into built architecture and imbue it with moral meaning. He devotes the central chapter to Lauro’s reconstruction of the double temple of Virtue and Honor, something not attempted before except in the imaginings of Federico Zuccari (a nice

discovery). Once imagined, this contraption of a building hit the Baroque architectural world with some force.

The last third of the book focuses on two lesser known works of Athanasius Kircher stemming from his sporadic wanderings around the more desolate corners of Lazio, like George Dennis in Etruria two centuries later. In the *Historia Eustachio-Mariana* of 1665 Kircher describes his campaign to restore a small medieval (he imagined Constantinian) church on the mountain where the Roman soldier Eustace saw a stag with a crucifix between its antlers, as in the Dürer engraving. In *Latium*, a sumptuous book of 1671, he provides beautiful if totally fictitious reconstructions of two ancient villas near Tivoli, one of Maecenas, which Tschudi identifies as a tribute to his patron Cardinal Francesco Barberini, and the other of a certain Quintilius Varus, whom he takes to be the famously unlucky commander of the legions lost in Germany. In form the villas are lifted from Lauro but they show Kircher's Christianizing view of time and history, on which the conclusion eruditely dwells. Kircher completes Lauro's work and does it better, we are told, and this reader indeed found it helpful to return to the early chapters on Lauro after reading those on Kircher.

One hopes that Lauro did not live long enough to read the scathing lines in G.V. Rossi's *Pinacotheca* of 1645, which likened him to a bird-catcher who snagged gold coins with cartoon-like images, epigrams and such nonsense dedicated to the rich, the well-born and foreigners from across the Alps. That did not stop the more painterly among Baroque architects, like Bernini, Cortona and Fischer von Erlach from flirting with his imagery. The torrent of recent interest in Kircher has been in no way slowed by the skepticism of contemporaries like Peiresc and Descartes. This thoughtful, elegantly written book has demonstrated that in our post-truth world scholarship should make room for Lauro too.

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