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The Moral Path to the Roman Past

(**FIGURE**) In 1615 the Roman engraver Giacomo Lauro published a lavish guidebook to Rome entitled *Antiquae Urbis Splendor*. It was not a guidebook to the contemporary city, however, but to the city that that had vanished: Almost one hundred monuments of ancient Rome were reconstructed graphically in this work, designed and engraved by Lauro himself.

When *Antiquae Urbis Splendor* came out, it had been long in preparation. One obstacle had been financing; after rounds of negotiations Lauro finally secured money for the publication by cleverly dividing the work into manageable portions sponsored by different patrons. (**FIGURE**) The work therefore consists of three *libri*, which, in return for funding, were dedicated to Sigismund III, king of Poland; Carlo Emanuele II, Duke of Savoy, and Ranuccio Farnese, Duke of Parma and Piacenza.

(**FIGURE**) Another obstacle was acquiring a so-called *privilegio*. This was an early form of copyright, printed at the beginning of books, intended to prevent keen rivals from executing copies. Lauro obtained privileges from the Venetian Republic, the Holy Roman emperor, and the pope. However, a privilege from the pope was given only to publications that expressed Christian values; reconstructions glorifying pagan Rome could hardly be seen to do so. Lauro, therefore, was eager to emphasize the lessons to be learned from antiquity; in the preface to the work he was explicit about his aim: "We have," he says "excluded nothing that could reveal either the vanity of ancient superstition or the truth and the glory of our Christian religion." The challenge he faced of course was how actually to show the truth and glory of the Christian religion in a culture that had been completely oblivious to it. Converting pagan Rome, at least in paper, required the most careful re-adjustment of the Christian antiquarian. I shall concentrate on just one image to show you how just how carefully he proceeded.

(**FIGURE**) In antiquity the *Temple of Honour and Virtue* stood by the Porta Capena, a southern gate to Rome. Nothing remained of the structure itself, but it was listed in the ancient regional catalogues, and early antiquarians like Pirro Ligorio included it in surveys. Mapmakers at the time even envisioned the temple: (**FIGURE**) Étienne Dupérac sketched a conventional temple with columns at the front, whereas Mario Cartaro, more imaginatively, represented a hexagonal building in two stories. Yet, nothing of this prepares us for Lauro's elaborate invention.

(**FIGURE**) A circular temple with a hemispherical dome stands on a low podium. This temple is reached through a smaller one, a miniature *tempietto*, which ends in a dome too, but this one is ogee-shaped in an almost oriental looking fashion, and perforated by *oculi*. An exedra, or perhaps a full circled colonnade (continuing beyond the frame of vision), embraces the temple compound and statues balance on the balustrade running on top. The elevation of the entire complex consists of a rather sophisticated rhythm of paired columns alternating with niches holding statues and trophies. In the background, two symmetrically placed spiral columns flank the precinct. Compared to the previous reconstructions of the site, the composition seems entirely capricious and according to recent historians "invented." I wish to nuance this idea and show that not only does the "invention" rest on sources that can be precisely identified, but the sources are also marshalled to convey a distinct message. As we shall see, the reconstruction deliberately distorts known facts, combines elements from various genres, transcends time and place, and ultimately aims to ennoble the readers. In short, ancient Rome reappears in a guise that one may call "Baroque."

As we go in detail, the *Temple of Honour and Virtue* emerges as a carefully balanced compromise between the actual historical site and the meaning Lauro wishes to invest it with. On one hand, Vitruvius and other ancient sources had left descriptions of the specific architecture, and, on the other, the concepts of virtue and honour pointed out a tradition of imaginative interpretations. The result is a palimpsest of images – layers of visual meaning – spanning various arts and drawing on emblems and allegories.

But let us first concentrate on the text below the picture. It is true that Lauro quotes relevant ancient authors, but he deliberately misguides his readers. In antiquity there were in fact *two* temples dedicated to "Honos et Virtus," and Lauro confuses the references to the degree that we are left unsure which temple he actually means. Initially, based on the Roman historian Livy, Lauro tells of a temple near the Porta Capena dedicated to Honour and Virtue. This structure is identical to the temple the general Marcellus vowed to erect in 222 BC after a successful battle. Marcellus' plan had been to rededicate an existing Temple of Honour to both Honour and Virtue. But, as Livy tells us, the priests of Rome did not allow one *cella* to house different deities and requested two distinct sanctuaries to be built. Marcellus' compound, therefore, took the form a twin temple– one dedicated to Honour and the other to Virtue. This interlocking of structures was crucial to Lauro's reconstruction.

Having introduced Marcellus' temple in his text, Lauro proceeds to quote another ancient author, Vitruvius, who wrote in the age of Augustus. Although Vitruvius also

described a Temple of Honour and Virtue, the description was not of the temple Marcellus built, but of one erected a hundred years later. Vitruvius ranked this temple among the foremost works in architecture and Lauro quotes Vitruvius' praise of the temple in the text field below the engraving.

However, just as significant as the passage he quotes, is the one he leaves out, in which Vitruvius told his readers that the temple counted six columns in front and six in the rear. It is a calculated discrimination of quotes, for the passage he omits pins down specific traits at odds with the compound he has in mind. The temple described by Vitruvius had the esteem, but the one built by Marcellus came with the layout, and Lauro's clever merging of the two is rooted more in field of rhetoric than in archaeology. In other words, the misconception is only apparent and forms instead part of an ingenious manoeuvring that prepares the ancient site for its "Baroque" transformation.

For it soon becomes clear that Lauro's objective is not to reconstruct the ancient *Temple of Honour and Virtue*, but to give honour and virtue, as moral standards, a visual form. Midway in his text Lauro tires of the historical temple and embarks on an altogether different discourse, namely a consideration of virtue and honour as such. To this surprising new agenda, the references to Livy and Vitruvius offered simply a prelude. Moral matters replace architectural ones when Lauro goes on to explain how any visitor to the site who sought to enter the temple of honour instead would find the door to that of virtue: "The ancient Romans," he continues, "taught that no one should be honoured, or desire honours, who had not entered and for a long time resided – with profit – in virtue." The high-principled conclusion he happily admits rephrases a passage from Augustine's *City of God* which stated that no one can attain honour without first possessing virtue. The architectural metaphor that Lauro wishes to create around this well-known passage overrides the dictates of archaeology, and his real mission emerges as that of giving a visible form to the all-important progression from virtue to honour. It is not the temple structures as such, but the transition between them that Lauro promotes, as a code of conduct, enacted in architecture, for patrons and public alike.

Lauro now needs visual support for his solution. The tiny temples we saw sketched in maps were too small to be on any help. Nor did they convey the appropriate moral content. Images that *did* convey a moral content, however, were emblems. The emblem genre was hugely popular in the 16th and 17th centuries and widely distributed in printed collections. Briefly put, an emblem captured an elusive concept or insight in a poignant verse and they were often accompanied by an image. The origin of the emblem genre is usually attributed to

the lawyer Andrea Alciato who issued his collections of poems with the title *Emblemata* in 1531. The fact that Lauro lists Alciato among his sources in the preface to *Antiquae Urbis Splendor* is an intriguing pointer. **(FIGURE)** And indeed, in an edition of Alciato's emblem book from 1567, we find the concepts "vigilance and protection" illustrated with a woodcut that resembles Lauro's complex: A circular building stands on a podium, crowned by a low, hemispherical dome, and as in Lauro's image, the elevation consists of niches and columns in an alternating rhythm. Similar too, is the entrance aedicule markedly set off against the main corpus, almost forming an ante-temple.

The woodcut illustrating Alciato's motto "vigilance and protection" is a convincing model from many perspectives, but not from the most significant one: it does not associate to *virtù*, the prevailing theme in Lauro's reconstruction. **(FIGURE)** A more convincing model, perhaps, is the modestly executed "Temple of Virtue" published by Guillaume de la Perrière in 1553; it connects to Lauro's *concetto* both on a moral and formal level. The accompanying poem is short and poignant: Virtue cannot attain honour without proceeding along an arduous path. In the picture de la Perrière adds the figure of Envy who follows in Virtue's footsteps and spews her poison. What the picture also shows is that once the summit successfully has been climbed one would have reached the Temple of Virtue, depicted balancing on the pinnacle of the hill top. The woodcut affirms the circular temple set within an exedra as virtue's own architectural form.

The two emblems demonstrate how the print antiquarian in the Baroque did not have to excavate and measure remains; he would only have to consult the nearest bookshop and pick up a book of emblems. But even so, antiquity does not become any less meaningful. On the contrary, "meaning" is precisely what archaeology through a careful accumulation and selection of sources produces.

(FIGURE) The Roman painter and art theorist Federico Zuccaro adds a final layer to Lauro's architectural palimpsest. This drawing, executed in the late 1570s, is an allegorical tableau entitled by scholars as *The Garden of the Liberal and Fine Arts*. To one side are figures representing the Sciences, such as astronomy, music and geometry, and to the other stand the Visual arts – sculpture, painting, poetry and architecture grouped around Apollo**.** Similar themes were popular in the Renaissance, and painted by for instance Raphael, but the novelty in Zuccaro's drawing is the architectural arrangement in the background. The assembly succinctly captures the various stages in the process towards the mastery in these arts: **(FIGURE)** Two centrally planned *tempietti* interconnect, one placed behind the other, and the correspondence to Lauro's composition is startling, not the least because the frontal

temple displays the identification "VIRTUTIS," whereas the temple in the back – not surprisingly – reads "HONORIS"

(**FIGURE**) Like Lauro, Zuccaro envisions man's moral progression as a walk through differently shaped pavilions. The entrance to virtue expectedly leads on to honour, but he does not let the journey end quite there. Connected by a colonnade Zuccaro adds a third temple, that of fame – *fama* – the ultimate goal, and a new element to the theme, perhaps reflecting the ambitious Roman artist's own idea of the true aim in life.

(**FIGURE**) Lauro' successful fusion of allegory and architecture, monuments and moral, proved irresistible to architects and patrons, and provides a key to unlock the meaning of a specific building type dominant well into the 18th century. From secular and religious perspectives alike, the notion of passing through virtue to attain honour suited the rhetoric of the baroque age in particular. In a moral organisation of architecture, if such a thing exists, Lauro's design pins down a type with a higher value, so to speak. It fuelled a variety of imitations in prints, stucco reliefs, and not the least in actual buildings which included cathedrals, royal palaces, and garden pavilions across Europe. (**FIGURE**) I will show you to example: This is an allegory of the so-called Parthenian Academy, an institution founded with the aim to to drill young Jesuits in matters of Faith. The symbolic content in the image is complex, but the edifice in the background we recognize. It copies Lauro's double temple, an appropriate architectural symbol in the education of Jesuit novices. (**FIGURE**) Most of you probably know Cortona's St. Maria della Pace in Rome from the1650s. Features such as the projecting temple and the curved wings repeat Lauro's solution. (**FIGURE**) This drawing, executed by one of Cortona's assistants, makes the connection explicit; it inscribes the church in the scheme of a twin temple. In short, I think we can say that Lauro's invention offered a morally charged prototype to Baroque architecture at large.

(**FIGURE**) In conclusion I shall shift focus entirely. With a truly Baroque playfulness, the twin temple serves a double function. A "theatre of virtue" did one later editor of the work call Lauro's majestic series, while another urged the reader to contemplate Lauro's ancient Rome with "virtuosa curiosità," in other words, with desire tempered by dignified conduct. Within a larger scheme the temple itself came to offer a gateway to a baroquely sanctified past. I have examined thirty-five early copies of *Antiquae Urbis Splendor* and in every copy the sequence of monuments vary. Only the *Temple of Honour and Virtue* remains unchanged as the first architectural image of Book II. The prominence, I would argue, symbolized how the reader himself would have to proceed through the "portal of virtue" before attaining the

glory of insight into ancient Rome. The image pointed out the moral path that the *studioso* would have to keep on as he or she leafed through the pagan splendors.

Whereas other frontispieces at the time featured triumphal arches and gateways, Lauro opted for a moral custom house, so to speak. Any ambition to pursue earthly magnificence, or indeed to build at all, was confiscated at the entrance to the imperial past. Instead Lauro says he hopes his reconstruction would inspire princes "to build in their souls similar temples of honour and virtue." Both in the world of buildings and in the world of books the twin temple must be said to fulfilled a function in the tuition of Baroque man.