

THE INVENTION OF THE HISTORIC MONUMENT

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In memory of André Chastel

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CHAPTER ONE

HUMANISMS AND THE ANCIENT MONUMENT

The birth of the historic monument can be located in Rome around the year 1420. After the exile in Avignon (1305–1377) and in the wake of the Great Schism (1397–1417), Martin V returns to reestablish the seat of the papacy in the dismantled city whose prestige and power he hopes to restore. A new intellectual climate begins to develop around the ruins of antiquity, which thereupon speak of history and confirm the fabled past of Rome, whose splendor is mourned and whose sack condemned by Poggio Bracciolini and his humanist friends.

Chronological ruptures have an essentially heuristic value. They must be modulated with respect to exceptions, anticipations, and survivals. We will see that the intellectual and artistic interest taken by a small Quattrocento elite in the monuments of antiquity was the product of a long maturation, and was prefigured already in the last quarter of the fourteenth century.

But would it not be appropriate to trace this genesis further back in time? One should even ask oneself, as certain historians have suggested, if the men of antiquity and of the Middle Ages did not, in certain cases, cast this same historian's and preservationist's eye on the monuments and the art objects of the past. The ancient art collection, which anticipates the museum, seems to have appeared at the end of the third century B.C. Between the death of Alexander and the Christianization of the Roman Empire, the territory of Greece revealed to the cultivated elite of its conquerors a treasury of public edifices (temples, *stoa*, theaters . . .) that seemed, in their eyes, to take on the aspect of historic monuments, just as Roman monuments did

later, in medieval Europe, in the eyes of clerics nourished by the humanities. Are these analogies illusory and superficial?

In the context of a work principally devoted to the Christian West, I cannot evoke antiquity more than cursorily, nor further assemble the fragments of the debate. Others have done so,¹ and a few reference points will suffice.

Classical Greek Art and Ancient Humanities

Kingdom of Pergamon:² without ever collecting them, the Attalids researched the sculptures and works of decorative art that classical Greece produced with fervor, sensitivity, and perseverance. Known from the accounts of Pausanias, Polybius, and Pliny, the collections of the Attalids belong neither to the category of religious and funerary treasures, such as were accumulated in Egyptian tombs or in the *opisthodomos* of Greek temples, nor to the category of curiosities amassed through wars, plunder, travel, or inheritance by the curious of all ages. These objects were researched, chosen, and acquired for their intrinsic quality. Attalus I dispatched emissaries throughout Greece, and in 210 B.C. he undertook at Aegina the first known excavations in history. The same approach led him and his successors to admire the great Hellenistic monuments and to commission copies of them for their capitals.

Rome: in 146 B.C., on the occasion of the division of the spoils between the allied armies after the sack of Corinth, Roman General L. A. Mummius is disconcerted by the size of bids submitted by Attalus II for objects whose interest the Romans do not perceive: he preempts a painting of Aristide (more than a century old), which he promptly dispatches, with a few statues, as an offering to the gods of Rome. This episode³ has been taken as the symbolic birth date of the work of art and of its collection by the Romans.

At first the Greek objects spoliated by the Roman armies make a discreet entry into the heart of a few patrician dwellings. But their status changes at the moment when Agrippa demands that works hoarded in the secret chambers of temples be exposed to public view, in the vivid light of roads and grand public spaces.

From that point on, as so often in other domains, Rome offers an ambiguous spectacle,⁴ upon which the gaze of the twentieth century is

tempted to project the values and the approaches of post-medieval, or even contemporary, Western society. Rome was brimming with art collectors – erudite like Asinius, refined like Atticus, gourmand like Seneca, suspicious like Cicero, passionate like Verres. Rome had an art market, experts, forgers, and courtiers. Rome despoiled Greece on a scale rivaling that of the Napoleonic pillages; witness the five hundred bronze statues ripped from the sanctuary of Delphi, remains of which can now be found in the Palace of Diocletian at Split, and in that of Hadrian at Tivoli. Rome saw the erection of the first life-size museum of architecture by this latter emperor, within the walls of this same Villa Hadriana.

However, the comparison with Western modernity should be tempered. In fact, no principle forbade the destruction of ancient buildings or works of art. They owe their preservation to fortuitous causes. Furthermore, neither the movable assets collected (sculptures, paintings, vessels, cameos), nor the admired ancient buildings (religious or civil) were invested with an historic value.

The key to their difference with the monuments and historic heritage of the West can be found in two characteristic features, one ethnic and one chronological. All of the objects that enchanted the Attalids and the Romans after them are of Greek origin.⁵ With the exception of a few works from the beginning of the sixth century, they date exclusively to the classical and Hellenistic periods. Their value is derived neither from their relationship to a history that they authenticate or help to date, nor to their antiquity: they bear witness to the accomplishments of a superior civilization. These are models, capable of inspiring an art of living and a refinement that only the Greeks had known. The Attalids hoped to turn their capital into a center of Greek culture. The Romans sought to infuse themselves visually with the plastic world of Greece, just as they sought to infuse themselves with Greek thought by practicing its language. This was not a reflexive and cognitive operation but a process of appropriation: fragments of architecture or of sculpture, objects of Greek craftsmanship, took on a new use value once assimilated into the decor of the baths, of the street, of public and private gardens, of dwellings, or even after conversion into the repositories of domestic life.

Finally, the same prudence should be observed with respect to our interpretation of the aesthetic value attributed to the creations of clas-

sical Greece. To be sure, a new experience of beauty, mediated by consciousness, begins to develop in the third century B.C. But it remains essentially subordinated to other categories of practices. Furthermore, one can discern in the majority of collectors motives alien to the pleasure itself of art: prestige⁶ for the conquerors, snobbism for the parvenus, lucre or love of the game for others. But, one might argue, do the same motivations not characterize a significant segment of important contemporary art collectors? Furthermore, the flavor and the behavior of the *amateur* seem manifest both in Pergamon and in Rome, where Sulla⁷ was the teacher of Verres. However, the choices made by taste are not oriented toward a vision of the past. To legitimately evoke the notion of historic monument, this era lacks the *distanciation* of history, underpinned by a deliberated project of preservation.

Antique Remains and Medieval Humanitas

The relationship maintained with the monuments of classical antiquity seems less complex between the time of the great invasions and the close of the Middle Ages.

In a Europe that Roman colonization had covered with monuments and public buildings, these centuries destroyed a prodigious amount. Two types of factors certainly contributed to this. On the one hand was Christian proselytism: the barbarian invasions of the sixth and seventh centuries may well have wrought less havoc than the proselytizing of missionaries in the same era, or than that of the theologian monks who transformed the amphitheater at Trier into a quarry and razed the amphitheater at Le Mans (1271) and the temple at Tours in the thirteenth century. On the other hand were indifference toward monuments that had lost their meaning and their use, instability, and destitution: the great structures of antiquity were either transformed into quarries⁸ or recuperated and transformed; in Rome, in the eleventh century, the arches of the Coliseum were blocked up and filled with dwellings, storehouses, and workshops, while the arena received a church and the citadel of the Frangipani; the Circus Maximus was replaced by dwellings rented out by the congregation of Saint-Guy; the arches of the theater at Pompeii were occupied by wine merchants and *trattoriae*, those of the Theater of Marcellus by

rag-dealers, second-hand clothes merchants, and taverns. In Provence, the amphitheater at Arles was transformed into a citadel, its arcades closed off, a block of dwellings constructed on its steps, and a church built in its center.⁹ Triumphal arches themselves were topped with defensive towers, like the one erected by the Frangipani on the Arch of Septimius Severus in the twelfth century.

And yet during the same period of time numerous pagan works and buildings were the subject of deliberate conservation, at the direct or indirect behest of the clergy, the only surviving custodian of a lettered tradition¹⁰ and of antique *humanitas*. Monuments, or an historic heritage before its time? One can answer only by attempting to analyze the motivations of this preservational attitude.

First, there were practical economic reasons, at a time of crisis when the population was decimated, construction extravagantly expensive, and craft traditions in the process of disappearing. The attitude of Pope Gregory the First in the sixth century is exemplary. He took charge of maintaining the totality of habitable buildings in Rome, practicing a politics of reuse that his successor Honorius would carry on: the great patrician dwellings were transformed into monasteries, their reception rooms into churches. Publicly he counseled his missionaries: "Do not destroy the pagan temples but the idols that they harbor. As far as the buildings themselves are concerned, be content to sprinkle them with holy water and place your altars and relics in them."¹¹ The appropriational practice of the hermit crab would be elevated into doctrine.

Utilitarian interest was not, however, the only factor at play in the preservation of ancient vestiges. Other motives brought literary knowledge and sensibility to bear. For the clergy, pagan monuments and objects resonated with the echo of familiar texts. The interest and respect shown to these works are consistent with the church's positions with respect to classical letters and learning, which they alternatively promoted in the name of the "humanities" or condemned as pagan. Thus, the favor shown toward *humanitas* and the arts of antiquity culminates at the time of those brief and partial renaissances that Panofsky has termed *renascenses*,¹² during the eighth and ninth centuries in the context of the politics of the Carolingians, then during the eleventh and twelfth centuries under the impetus of the great humanist abbeys. When William of

Volpiano, Gauzelin of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, and Hugo of Cluny, then Hildebert of Lavardin, John of Salisbury, Suger of Saint-Denis, or Guibert of Nogent go to Rome, it is in the thrall of their classical culture that they admire its monuments and seek to identify them.

Intellectual attraction was at play, to be sure, but also the seduction of sensibility: antique works fascinated them by their size, by the refinement and mastery of their execution, by the richness of their materials. Treasures, haloed in the aura of the marvelous, they correspond to one of the two "aesthetics"¹³ of the Middle Ages, the one that Suger championed against Bernard of Clairvaux. When the Abbot of Saint-Denis had the furnishings of his church repaired, he admired "the marvelous workmanship," "the magnificent sumptuousness," of an altar panel made by "barbarian artists . . . more magnificent than ours" and "the very delicate sculpture, now irreplaceable [of the] ivory tablets [of the throne]" which surpasses all human evaluation for "the description that it offers of antique scenes."¹⁴

The quasi-magical value attributed to the vestiges of antiquity, the curiosity that they arouse, and the pleasure that they offer to the eyes are illustrated in the manuscripts of two twelfth-century clerics. With his *Mirabilia urbis Romae* of circa 1155, Benedictus, canon of St. Peter's, proposes the first guide devoted exclusively to the pagan monuments of Rome, even if his usually fantastical identifications of them are still, nonetheless, uniformly tied to literary recollections. As for the English jurist known by the name of Master Gregorius, he is not sure whether to attribute the marvels visited during his visit to Rome to magic or to the work of human hands.¹⁵ When he reports having on three occasions traveled several miles to admire the Quirinal or a Venus executed with "such a marvelous and inexplicable expression that she seems to blush in her nudity," he describes the behavior of an art *amateur*. Into the same category should fall his illustrious compatriot Henry, Bishop of Winchester, whom John of Salisbury, despite being himself also a collector of ancient statues, depicted as a veritable fanatic of ancient art.¹⁶

Do the interest and jubilation that ancient monuments arouse in the protohumanists of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages not anticipate the experience of the humanists of the fifteenth century? One might at times believe so on the basis of the enthusiasms and the lyri-

cism of medieval authors. But an irreducible distinction opposes these two forms of humanism and their respective relationships to antiquity: the (historical) distance that the Quattrocento observer established, for the first time, between the contemporary world to which he belongs and the remote antiquity whose vestiges he studies. For the clerics of the eighth or twelfth century, the antique world is both impenetrable and near at hand. *Impenetrable*, because Roman or Romanized territories have become Christian, and the pagan vision of the world no longer prevails, it is no longer conceivable. Literary or plastic expressions, rendered indecipherable by the loss of their referents, are reduced to empty forms. *Near*, because these empty forms, which can be seen and touched, are immediately transposable, and are transposed, into the Christian context where they are reinterpreted according to familiar codes.¹⁷

Maybe Henry of Winchester or Gregorius are dazzling exceptions. Be that as it may, the formulation itself and the formulas of admiration should not be detached from their context. When Hildebert of Lavardin, in his great poem on Rome in the beginning of the twelfth century, rhapsodizes about a work that can never be "either equaled" "or repeated," and when he evokes the "passion of the artisans" (*studio artificium*) responsible for these images that nature could not have produced, one must not forget that he begins by praising the (purifying) mutilation of the city of intolerable pretensions, whose remains¹⁸ he can thereafter cherish in good conscience. Richard Krautheimer rightly emphasized this ambivalence, to the point of conceiving of it in terms of love-hate. He showed, furthermore, how protohumanism literally appropriated the vestiges of the antique world in Christianizing them.

The absence of distance, also described by Panofsky in his analyses of the transmission of antique themes and forms in the Middle Ages,¹⁹ is the common denominator of all the behaviors associated with the heritage of Greco-Roman antiquity. Bernard of Chartres and Gilbert of La Porrée overlaid Platonic idealism and the categories of Aristotle with the grate of Christian theology. A Romanesque sculptor integrates antique monsters in the representations of a biblical scene, and an illuminator dresses the heroes of Greek mythology in medieval clothes. The same is true where the objects or monuments of

antiquity are concerned: regardless of the knowledge of those that make use of them and the value attributed to them, they are directly assimilated and introduced into the circuit of Christian practices, unaccompanied by the symbolic distance and proscriptions that insertion into history would have imposed. There was no question of assuming the otherness of another culture. The buildings are invested in innocence and with a sense of familiarity, without hesitation or scruple, as are plastic forms and philosophical texts.

Whether movable or fixed, the creations of antiquity do not, therefore, play the role of historic monuments. Their preservation is, in fact, reuse. It manifests itself in two distinct forms: global reutilization, accompanied or not by improvements; and fragmentation in bits and pieces, usable for diverse purposes and in various settings.

Suger celebrates the Mass with a precious antique poryphyry vessel²⁰ encased by a medieval goldsmith in silver gilt between the feet, wings, and neck of an eagle. Similarly, the Imperial Palace at Trier is converted in the ninth century into a cathedral whose pavement "consisting of different-colored marbles" and whose doors "sheathed in a red gold that resembles a very light hyacinth,"²¹ are admired by Bishop Hincmar; during the same era the Temple of Augustus and Livia at Vienne, in the Lyon region, severed from the wall of its *cella*, becomes the church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Vie.

But antique monuments are not simply "recycled"; they are, with equally offhand nonchalance, cut up into pieces and fragments and reinserted into new constructions, to embellish and decorate them. In fact, it is not always easy to distinguish between a utilitarian reuse, even if spoliative, and what Jean Adhémar considers a true act of conservation.²² Columns, capitals, statues, sculpted friezes are thus removed from the buildings that proclaimed the glory of ancient cities. Since the sixth century, Rome was the most significant mine of prestigious materials for new sanctuaries, erected either on their very territory (San Lorenzo fuori le Mura, San Pancrace, Santa Agnese) or elsewhere in Italy and in other countries.

Charlemagne has the marbles and columns that he will use at Aix-la-Chapelle and Saint-Riquier brought back from Rome and Ravenna, with the authorization of Pope Hadrianus I. Desiderius sends to Rome for columns, bases, and capitals for his Abbey of

Monte Cassino (1066). Suger, while enlarging Saint-Denis, despairs of finding the necessary materials:

By reflection, by inquiry, and by investigation through different regions of remote districts, we endeavored to learn where we might obtain marble columns or columns the equivalent thereof. Since we found none, only one thing was left to us, distressed in mind and spirit: we might obtain them from Rome (for in Rome we had often seen wonderful ones in the Palace of Diocletian and other Baths) by safe ships through the Mediterranean, thence through the English Sea and the tortuous windings of the River Seine, at great expense to our friends and even under convoy of our enemies, the nearby Saracens.²³

But suddenly a miracle occurs: he discovers, near Pontoise, "an admirable quarry," and he gives up his plan.

Rome was not, however, by far, the only reservoir of antique fragments. At Lyon, it is the marbles of the *Forum vetus* that help to construct Saint-Martin-d'Ainay, and its columns the apse of the cathedral. The journeys taken are often more distant still. In 1049, Odilon of Cluny fetches the materials of his cloister in Provence; Nîmes and Arles furnish sculptures and columns for the cathedral of Saint-Germain at Auxerre and for the Abbey churches of both Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris and Moissac.

There is no need to multiply the examples. The small renaissances that prepared the Renaissance did not allow the artificial perspective to become systematized, even if its way had already been paved. They did allow the further opening of a perspective on the monuments of antiquity.

We should, however, emphasize the original privileges that authorized Rome to be the first to take distance with respect to its antique heritage and to situate it in historical space.

First of all, the city, which had marked all the conquered territories of the empire with its urban institutions and its architecture, itself offered the greatest concentration of famous antique buildings. Above all, despite the painful doubts of the fourth century, and then successive sacks by the barbarians, the classical culture transmitted by converted patricians had remained alive there. In addition, the popes had regarded themselves as the inheritors of Rome, first as against the

Byzantine tradition, then against the barbarity of the invaders, and finally against the hegemony of the German emperors.

They exercised, in particular, the traditional responsibilities of the Roman emperors in matters of municipal construction and architecture. As early as the beginning of the fifth century²⁴ the revival of classicism led them to replace the Constantinian basilicas with more pure and refined models inspired by the Baths of Trajan, Caracalla, and Diocletian, and by the basilicas with superimposed orders, those of Trajan and Septimius Severus, which thereby took on a new value. In 408 a decree was issued encouraging the secular use of temples to be protected as public monuments. The disasters of the sixth century led to the conversion of secular edifices into churches: in 526–530 the audience hall of the prefect becomes the church of Saints Cosmos and Damian, in 580 a first-century ceremonial hall receives the church of Santa Maria Antiqua, before the Senate of the Roman Forum, under Honorius, is converted into a church to Saint Hadrian. On the other hand, and no doubt because the classical tradition remains closer and more alive in Rome, Gregory the Great and his successors reveal themselves, in the city more than elsewhere, to be hostile to the Christianization of temples. The Pantheon, dedicated in 609 to the Virgin Mary,²⁵ stands as a precedent for more than three hundred years.

The boundaries are difficult to trace, in this papal salvage operation, between measures dictated by utility and those inspired by historical interest or yet the will to affirm an identity through monuments. Two series of *monuments* appeal simultaneously to two kinds of memory: the closer is the religiously based memory that structures daily life and defines its horizons, the more remote that of a temporal and glorious past. It is these two interlocking memories that together invoke St. Peter's and the Coliseum, St. John Lateran and the Column of Marcus Aurelius, and Santa Maria in Trastevere and the Arch of Titus, just as the Bull of Louis le Bavaois associates them in its small golden setting.²⁶

The simultaneous visual presence of these two types of monument in Rome, referring to two such distant traditions, no doubt provoked an awareness of difference, and the creation of a second distance with respect to the monuments of antiquity. The edict by which the Roman Senate protects the Column of Trajan in 1162 is ambivalent: "We wish for it to remain intact as long as the world endures. . . . He who at-

tempts to harm it will be condemned to the worst punishment and his assets will be turned over to the Treasury." Monument, or already an historic monument? It is impossible to decide. In rewriting history, one might imagine that the historic monument would have been born a century earlier if the popes had not had to leave Rome and abandon it to the pillagers and to the wild grasses.

When Martin V returns there definitively in 1420, Rome has become, for a population of some 17,000 inhabitants, the *dehabitato*. The great antique monuments lie among vines and pastures, if they have not been occupied and filled up with dwellings. The structure of imperial Rome has been erased by the processional traces of a pilgrimage city.²⁷

In the context of the revolution in knowledge that Italy was experiencing at the time, this same ruined image of an antiquity just re-discovered by the dazzling light of texts practically obliges the observing eye to lend an historic dimension to Roman monuments. It is in this mental context, at these sites and under the plural designation of "antiquities," that the birth of the historic monument should be located. It will take three more centuries for it to acquire its definitive name.

The Classicizing Phase of the Quattrocento

I call the first phase of this development "classicizing" because its interest in the vestiges of the past as such focuses on the edifices and artworks of classical antiquity only, to the exclusion of those of any other era. Numerous accounts permit us to fix around 1430 the remarkable awakening of the distantiated and aesthetic gaze, detached from medieval passions, which, in fixing upon antique edifices, turns them into objects of reflection and contemplation. However, we must remember that the ground was laid for this new attitude during the second half of the Trecento. Historians and art historians²⁸ who have looked into the artistic and intellectual movements that developed in Quattrocento Italy have identified and distinguished in the Trecento two original approaches, characteristic respectively of humanists and artists. These two approaches contributed to a first conceptualization of history as a discipline and

of art as an autonomous activity. As such they were also a necessary condition for the crystallization of the object that we call the historic monument, and that is tied by a generative link to the dual notions of history and of art.

On the one hand, then, was a literary approach, introducing what one might call "the Petrarch effect." By way of classical texts that his philological and critical reading seeks to restore to their original purity, Petrarch unveils an unknown antiquity (*Vetustas*), upon which he confers the adjectives holy and sacred in his poem *Africa* (1338). This radiant antiquity consigns to the darkness of ignorance the centuries of the Christian West that helped to render it misunderstood, and to falsify its masterpieces. And if in its halo of light this antiquity takes on the value of perfection and model, it reveals also, for the first time, its fundamental otherness. The purifying reading of the poet, who wished to read the verses of Virgil without barbarism and glosses, discovered and founded the phenomenon of historical distance. It would be left to his humanist successors to excavate it ever further.²⁹

From that point on, for Petrarch and his circle of friends, antique buildings acquire a new value. They are the bearers of a second mediation that authenticates and confirms that of books. They testify to the reality of a past gone by. They are torn from the familiar and trivializing grip of the present to make the glory of the centuries that built them shine forth. They deplete the fabulous resonance of Greek and Latin texts by their presence, and this power manifests itself nowhere more than in Rome.

However, at the time when Petrarch writes the poem *Africa*, classical buildings still bear an exclusively textual relation to antiquity. The form and appearance of Roman monuments do not appeal to visual sensibility; they give legitimacy to literary memory. Above all, the entire site of Rome, more than its individual monuments, evokes "an exemplary and timeless way of life, of *virtus*, manliness,"³⁰ in a word, a moral climate.

In 1375, a literate friend of Petrarch, doctor Giovanni Dondi, sends his impressions of Rome to Fra Guglielmo da Cremona:

I have seen statues . . . bronze or marble preserved to this day, and the many scattered fragments of broken sculpture, the grandiose triumphal

arches and the columns that show sculptured into them the histories of great deeds and many other similar ones erected publicly in honor of great men, because they established peace and saved the country from threatening danger . . . as I remember reading about, not without some remarkable excitement, wishing you also might see them [the monuments] some day, similarly strolling and stopping a little somewhere and perhaps saying to yourself: "There are indeed the testimonies [*argu-menta*] of great men."³¹

It has been said of this letter, as of other contemporary correspondence, that they sent back an "almost emphatically non-visual"³² image of Rome. Their exclusive participation in the world of the written word and their essentially philological, literary, moral, political, and historical concerns continued to condition the approach and the gaze of the humanists who made the trip to Rome until the first decades of the fifteenth century, and often much later. Coluto Salutati, who from the last decade of the fourteenth century was the mainspring of Florentine humanism and summoned the Greek Chrysoloras to Florence in 1396, and Leonardo Bruni, the chancellor-historian, are no exceptions to the rule. To be sure, their visit is more focused, it confirms more numerous and precise readings. It is also facilitated by the presence in Rome of literate individuals, such as Poggio,³³ who play the role of guide with passion and skill.

However, without exception, these visitors are not interested in the monuments themselves. For them, the testimony offered on the past by the text still holds sway over all others. It is above all Cicero, Livy (Titus Livius), and Seneca that the humanists evoke and invoke in their context. To the antique edifices themselves they prefer the inscriptions that cover them. In 1452, in the prologue of the *De re aedificatoria*, Alberti summarizes the limitations of this attitude, which he himself has already left behind: "[The] tombs of the Romans and the vestiges of their former magnificence that we see all around us have taught us to trust the accounts of the Latin historians who would otherwise, no doubt, have seemed less credible to us."

On the other hand, this literary approach to antique edifices will be confronted much later, at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, by the sensory approach of "men of art" (*artifices*)³⁴ who, unlike the humanists, are interested essentially in their physical forms. It was, in fact, up to sculptors³⁵ and architects to discover in Rome the

formal world of classical art. One could term it “the Brunelleschi effect,” inasmuch as the architect of the dome of Santa Maria dei Fiore is the most illustrious of its discoverers. But he is not the first.

Dondi’s letter, quoted above, already mentions this second “effect” undergone and transmitted by the *artifices* and which, far from blending into the “Petrarch effect,” sounds alien and strange to the humanist ear. After having confided to his correspondent his own reactions as a man of letters, Dondi opposes to them that “of our modern *artifices*” in the face of the old buildings, statues and other similar objects “of antique Rome”:

[If they] look at them carefully they are stunned. I myself used to know a marble sculptor – a craftsman in this field, famous among those whom Italy then had. . . . More than once I heard him discuss (*movere*) the statues and sculptures he had seen in Rome with such admiration and veneration that in his discourse he seemed to be all beyond himself. . . . He talked a great deal about the excellence (*bonitas*) of these figures and praised their makers and acclaimed their genius beyond all measure. He used to conclude – I quote his own words – that if these sculptures had only a spark of life, they would be better than nature.³⁶

The raptures of the anonymous sculptor seem identical to those of Henry of Winchester or of Gregorius. However, the similarity of the formulations conceals a capital difference: it is no longer a scholar, but an *artifex* who is expressing himself through the intermediary of Dondi. The pleasure that he succumbs to is linked to the specificity of his activity as a practitioner. It goes without saying that such pleasure, engendered by the quality itself of the sculptures of ancient buildings, independent of their symbolic value, had already been felt by any number of master masons or medieval sculptors. The novelty of the experience related by Dondi stems from the fact that the disinterested contemplation of the antique work of art is explicitly assumed and laid claim to. A distance is thereby established with respect to the vestiges of antiquity, analogous to that taken at the same time by the successors of Petrarch.

As a general rule, this does not make the approach of the *artifex* and the world of plastic form any less inaccessible to the sensibility of the scholars. They remain so throughout the first decades of the century, while Brunelleschi repeats his study trips to Rome³⁷ where he measures and records antique buildings, and while like him, and at

times with him, Donatello, Ghiberti, Luca della Robbia, from Florence, return again and again to Rome to analyze the models of classical sculpture.

According to certain historians, the synthesis of the two approaches, that of the artist and that of the scholar, was realized during the last quarter of the fourteenth century. In this view, Dondi's letter to Guglielmo da Cremona signaled not the opposition of two parallel and independent currents, but the analysis of two constituent parts, placed on an equal footing. The latter, it is argued, were jointly at play in the attitudes of the first *amateurs* of antique art, of which Niccolò Niccoli is the tutelary figure.³⁸

Already in 1380 this Florentine *érudite* who began by collecting the manuscripts of classical authors, was fascinated by antique sculpture, which was searched out across all of Italy at his behest. The collection that he left to Cosimo de' Medici qualifies him as the first art *amateur* in the modern sense of the term. For Gombrich,³⁹ Niccoli is the catalyst that spurred the flowering of the Italian Quattrocento collectors – princes, scholars, and artists. His expertise and sensibility are known through his correspondence,⁴⁰ notably with Poggio Bracciolini, for whom he was a frequently sought out advisor.

Niccoli is nonetheless exceptional. Among the *litterati* of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the *amateurs* of ancient art represent a small minority. This minority is dominated by the complex and precocious figure of Poggio, who seems, in fact, to have been one of the first to succeed in merging the two gazes of the scholar and the aesthete. The correspondence and the writings of this scholar, to whom we owe the rediscovery of Vitruvius,⁴¹ reveal how, gradually and with some apprehension, with a sort of embarrassment and guilty conscience, he gives free rein to the aesthetic delectation that the antique sculptures and edifices provide for him. He becomes a collector, but it is not by chance that he asks Donatello to confirm his enthusiasms. It is Donatello and Brunelleschi who educated his eye and his sensibility, and who taught him to see classical architecture and sculpture a little earlier than his colleagues in the Roman Curia and his Florentine compatriots.

In fact, over the course of the 1420s and 1430s, an unprecedented dialogue would be forged between artists and humanists. On the one hand, the former shape the gaze of the latter, teaching them to see

with new eyes. On the other hand, the latter reveal historical perspective and the richness of Greco-Roman *humanitas* to the architects and sculptors, lending newfound acuity and depth to their vision of antique forms. Donatello, Brunelleschi, and Ghiberti disclosed the art of Rome to Alberti beginning with his first visit in the 1420s. But reciprocally, it is Albert's influence that explains why Ghiberti completely casts off the old medieval man and creates the Gates of Paradise in 1429.⁴²

As a result of this process of "mutual impregnation," artists and humanists together carved out the territory of art and articulated it with that of history so as to implant in it the historic monument. This notwithstanding, the new humanist gaze on the architecture and sculpture of classical antiquity does not engage the faculty of aesthetic judgment. Historical knowledge remains the primary and sole requisite in the institution of "antiquities." Numerous examples testify to this, from Leonardi Bruni to Donato Acciajuoli, or Pomponius Leto. Countless scholars would make the trip to Rome to measure the temples for the sole satisfaction of interpreting Vitruvius' text. For many, and for a long period of time, the visual analysis of the historian, as attentive and precise as it might become, would remain imprisoned by the template of received knowledge.

Alberti's intellectual adventure can be taken to illustrate, conversely, the stages of a synthesis achieved between the erudite gaze and the gaze of the artist. His first encounter with Rome is that of the reader of Livy and of Cicero. The city is for him a collection of names, those of monuments (altars, temples, basilicas, theaters, palaces) whose inventory he draws up in the preface of his treatise *Della famiglia* (1428). But soon he becomes archaeologist, then architect. The buildings first perceived as witnesses to Roman history are soon studied and documented in the topographical plan that he prepares for Nicholas V in preparation for the restoration of the city.⁴³

Finally, the Roman work site is read as a construction lesson, then as an introduction to the problem of beauty. For the author of the *De re aedificatoria*, the buildings of Rome are both the illustration of the rules of architectural beauty that he is trying to formulate in mathematical terms, and the culmination of an inaugural "history of architecture" that he sees beginning in gigantism in Asia, continuing through Greek experimentation with measurement and proportions, and finally achieving

its perfection in Rome, where the architects of the Quattrocento will be able to learn from the example of the vestiges. No mention is made of the obscure centuries that knew nothing of beauty.⁴⁴

Conversely, other architects of the same era, such as Ghiberti or Filarete, were not averse to mentioning the works of certain thirteenth- and fourteenth-century builders in their writings. Their analyses⁴⁵ made an original contribution to the historiography of architecture. They remain, nonetheless, dominated by Petrarch's tripartite periodization: beautiful antiquity, dark ages, and modern renaissance. This schema, assured a long career, conditions and orients the vision of scholars, artists, and their patrons. It excludes from its domain anything that belongs to intermediary periods. The historic monument can only belong to antiquity; art can only be antique or contemporary.

The humanist literature on the knowledge and pleasure dispensed by the works of antiquity implies their deliberate and organized conservation. This latter takes on different forms depending upon whether the works in question are movable objects or buildings. On the one hand, coins, inscriptions, sculptures, and diverse fragments collected by Italian artists, humanists, and princes are conserved in the *studioli*, and in the antechambers, courtyards, and gardens of their residences. The gallery, a specific organ for exhibition, does not appear until the sixteenth century, but the *amateurs* of the fifteenth century do have buildings constructed to house their collections (Mantegna's villa in Mantua). The collection, which is distinct from the cabinet of curiosities,⁴⁶ precedes the museum. While of a private nature, it offers the first example of the opening to the public (once a year), beginning in 1471 with the pontifical collections of the Capitoline.

On the other hand, the conservation of buildings (monuments, great works of engineering, etc.) necessarily takes place *in situ*. It calls forth completely different techniques. It partakes of the public and political domain, and engages complex municipal, economic, social, and psychological mechanisms that give rise to conflicts and difficulties. One does not collect Roman temples or amphitheaters. The passion of the collector cannot be mobilized for their protection. Against the social forces of destruction that threaten them, antique buildings have as their sole protection – unpredictable, if not ineffectual – the passion

for knowledge and the love of art. This is why the Quattrocento's recognition of the dual historical and artistic value of the monuments of antiquity did not lead to their effective and systematic conservation. The Rome of the fifteenth century shows a remarkable ambivalence in this regard.

Beginning in the 1430s and the pontificate of Eugenius IV (1431–1447), the humanists, in particular those of the pontifical court, are unanimous in calling for the conservation and vigilant protection of Roman monuments. In unison, in their works as in their correspondence, they stigmatize the conversion of the city into quarries that feed new construction and lime kilns. Poggio describes the Rome of Nicolas V to a friend:

There is a nearly infinite abundance of buildings, sometimes splendid ones, of palaces, of residences, of tombs and of diverse ornaments, but completely in ruins. It is a shame and an abomination to see the porphyries and marbles stripped from these ancient buildings and transformed ceaselessly into lime. The current state of affairs is sad indeed and the beauty of Rome is in the process of being destroyed.⁴⁷

Flavio Biondo echoes his sentiment and confirms the picture. He denounces “the imprudent hand of those who transfer and integrate ancient marbles and old stones into other, sordid, construction”; he describes the vines that grow “where once one saw superb buildings [whose] admirable dressed stones have been transformed into lime”; he bears witness: “Next to the Capitolium and opposite the Forum stands the portico of a Temple of Concord that I saw nearly intact when I first came to Rome, lacking only its marble revetment. Subsequently, the Romans reduced it entirely to lime and demolished its portico, tearing down its columns.”⁴⁸

The same *topoi* of the skeleton stripped of its skin and the infamy that follows glory continued to be developed, from Poggio's *Ruinarum descriptio urbis Romae* (1450–1452) through Raphael's letter to Leo X (around the year 1516), by way of the poem (1453) that Cardinal Piccolomini, the future Pius II, addresses to Rome “deprived of its antique glory” and whose “impious populace rips the stones from its walls and transforms hard marbles into lime.”⁴⁹ From one text to the next the violence of the protests is identical, whether it conveys concerns of an exclusively historical order (Pomponius Leto

under Sixtus IV) or expresses painful regret for a beauty lost (Fausto Maddalena dei Capo under the same pontificate).

The task of preservation is incumbent upon the popes, as in the time of Gregory the Great. But it now implies a modern form of conservation, no longer appropriative and damaging, but distanced, objective, and armed with measures for the restoration and protection of antique buildings against the multiple assaults to which it is subjected.

Beginning with the return of Martin V, a succession of papal bulls are issued to this end, at times several times under the same pontificate. The bull entitled *Cum aliam nostram urbem*, promulgated on April 28, 1462, by Pius II Piccolomini, is exemplary. At the very outset, the pope distinguishes between monuments and antiquities. Wishing to conserve "the mother city in her dignity and splendor," he intends to "deploy the most vigorous care" not only "for the upkeep and preservation" of the basilicas, churches, and all other holy sites of this city, but also in order that future generations will find the buildings of antiquity and their fragments intact. Indeed, these latter, at once, "confer to said city its most beautiful adornment and its greatest charm," incite us to follow the glorious example of the ancients, and "above all, what is even more important, these same buildings permit us to better perceive the fragility of human affairs."

"Moved by these considerations," and sensitive as well to the entreaties of his entourage, the pope then articulates a set of precise and formal restrictions regarding antique edifices, from which no category of transgressors is exempted. He proclaims his total agreement with "those of [his] predecessors who expressly opposed the demolition and degradation of antique buildings," and he recalls the decree, still in force, that forbids these degradations and punishes them with precise pecuniary penalties. Further, in turn, with "the weight of his apostolic authority," and under pain of excommunication and severe fines, he forbids

all, religious or lay persons, without exception, regardless of their power, their dignity, their status or rank, no matter with what ecclesiastical (even pontifical) or worldly luster they might be adorned, from demolishing, dismantling, damaging, or converting into lime, directly or indirectly, publicly or secretly, any public building of antiquity or any antique vestige existing on the soil of the said City or in its environs,

even if it is located in properties that belong to them in the city or countryside.⁵⁰

The pontifical proposition is firm and exhaustively precise. The punitive measures are aimed at "all artisans or workers who have been caught in the midst of demolition or degradation, as well as those in whose name they acted." *Ad hoc* agents have thus "full and complete authority" to "imprison [the violators], confiscate their animals, their instruments and other assets . . . and force them to pay their fines."⁵¹ No exception to these measures may be granted except by the sovereign pontiff, and such a procedure must be the object of a bull or an apostolic brief. Finally, in order that none might feign ignorance of these stipulations, they are to be proclaimed and posted throughout the city.

The popes did not content themselves with preventative measures. They cleared out, disencumbered, and restored antiquities. Martin V reestablishes the post of *Magister viarum*. Eugenius IV repairs the roof of the Pantheon and disengages it from surrounding construction. Nicholas V (1447–1455) has Alberti draw up a topographical plan of Rome, which will be the basis of a grand project to restructure the city, reestablishing a portion of its antique axes. The aqueduct of Virgineo⁵² is restored to operation, the Aurelian Wall repaired, and a destructive restoration rids the perimeters of the Pantheon and the Ponte Sant'Angelo of the parasitic constructions that encumber them.

Pius II (1458–1464) assures the credibility of his bull by having marble quarries opened for the first time at Carrara, to take over from the Coliseum. Paul II, in turn, orders the restoration of the Arch of Septimius Severus, the Forum Romanum, the Coliseum, and the Column of Trajan. Sixtus IV (1471–1484) restores the Temple of Vesta, and orders the disengagement of the Arch of Titus, which was still encased within the medieval fortifications of the Frangipani. In addition, he defines the rules of expropriation for public utility and publishes the first edict against the export of works of art.

It would be tedious to list all the protective measures taken in Rome through the end of the Quattrocento. However, neither the elevated moral tone of the texts nor the magnitude of conservational projects accomplished should conceal the antithetical behavior that is, para-

doxically, coextensive with them: the same protagonists that describe themselves, and indeed show themselves to be so deeply implicated in the cause of conservation, participated no less steadfastly, clearsightedly, and cheerfully in the devastation of Rome and its antiquities.

In fact, antique monuments never ceased to be used as quarries to nourish the papal politics of new construction. Agreements and contracts made with entrepreneurs have been uncovered in pontifical archives: we know the names of two entrepreneurs who, in 1425 under Martin V, were assigned the task of finding beautiful stones needed for the restoration of the pavement of St. John Lateran in old monuments. Under Nicholas V, the Forum, the Circus Maximus, and the Aventine produced two thousand five hundred carts of marble and cut stone per year, not counting the travertine and tufa extracted from the Coliseum. We know as well that thirty thousand ducats were paid annually to one Beltramo de Varesus who maintained his own lime kiln.⁵³

It is clear from the examination of accounts that Pius II Piccolomini himself, in addition to his bulls and the quarries he opened in Carrara, made extensive use of the marble and travertine blocks of the Coliseum and the Capitol for his constructions at the Vatican and St. Peter's. He likewise sacked the Port of Ostia and Hadrian's Villa, and acknowledged that "the construction of a citadel absorbed almost in their entirety materials drawn from the neighboring vestiges of our noble Amphitheater of Tivoli."

Similarly, the Venetian Cardinal Pietro Barbo, the future Paul II, obtained the rights to the Coliseum for the erection of the famous Palazzo Venezia, which would house his collections of antique art. As for Sixtus IV, it was again the Coliseum that furnished the materials for the bridge that bears his name, and a half-dozen temples and triumphal arches paid the costs of his politics of construction.⁵⁴

How to explain the ambivalence of these princes and popes, Venetian, Florentine, and Siennese alike, who, over the course of time, protected the classical edifices of the city with one hand and damaged them with the other? For that matter, it is against their role in the massacre of Rome that the reprobation of the humanists is most often mobilized: Poggio and Biondo take aim at Nicholas V; Pomponius Leto and Fausto Maddalena at Sixtus IV. Later on, after Lorenzo de' Medici has pillaged Rome and Ostia (under Innocent VIII) and Alexander VI

has had the Forum put up for adjudication by the Apostolic Chamber, the letter of Raphael to Leo X⁵⁵ will again call into question the responsibility of the popes and their families.

Even the attitude of the protesters, be they scholars or artists, is not always consistent. Raphael is not content to weep lyrically over "the corpse of that noble nation, once queen of the world, today so wretchedly mutilated." He denounces the state of affairs with singular audacity:

I am emboldened to say that all this new Rome which we now see, however great she is, however beautiful, however much we may find her adorned with palaces, churches, and other building, that she is made entirely with lime from ancient marbles. Nor can I without much feeling of sorrow remember that, since I have been in Rome, which is not yet eleven years, there have been ruined so many beautiful things, like the Meta in Via Alessandrina, the unfortunate Arch, so many columns and temples. . . . It should not therefore, Holy Father, be among the last thoughts of your Holiness to have concern that the little which remains of this ancient mother of glory . . . be not extirpated and devastated by the malicious and the ignorant.⁵⁶

And yet the same Raphael profits from a brief from the same Leo X, assigning to him "as architect of St. Peter's, the general inspection of all excavations and all discoveries of stones and marble that will be made henceforth in Rome and within a radius of ten miles, in order that [he be able] to purchase anything that [he] will need for the construction of this new temple."⁵⁷

In fact, dazzled by the light of classical antiquity and of antiquities, these men were unable, from one day to the next, to free themselves from an ancestral mentality, to forget behaviors that were inscribed in the *longue durée* and that remained those of the majority of their contemporaries, both literate and illiterate. The adoption of distance with respect to the buildings of the past requires a long apprenticeship, one experienced over a period of time that knowledge cannot contract, and that is required before familiarity can be replaced by respect.

Moreover, the development of collections and the bulimia of the collectors, whether of inscriptions or of sculptures, found a privileged terrain in the buildings from which these buildings were shamelessly

stripped. This sort of degradation would increase, keeping pace with the growing number of *amateurs* and the flowering of the art trade.

Finally, above all, the contradictory attitude of the popes and their entourage is dictated by an economic and technical politics linked to the need to embellish and modernize the city, to make of it a great secular capital. The urgency of taking action demands construction materials that are not available in sufficient quantities, and of empty spaces in which to realize their programs and rival the accomplishments of classical antiquity. As would be the case later on, in the context of the modernization of territories undertaken during the centuries of classicism, or yet in the wake of the sale of national assets initiated in France by the Revolution, and as we still witness before our eyes today for the same reasons, the entrepreneurs and promoters of projects are very often those who carry out the base works of destruction.

For perhaps most significantly, this ambivalence of the popes, which resembles duplicity, announces an important dimension of the Western discourse on patrimonial conservation and protection in general, and those of historic monuments and antiquities in particular. Whether appealing to reason or sentiment, the latter will often become the conscience of the demolisher and the support of demolition. In linking the notion of antiquities to that of their preservation, and in thus putting the concept of destruction out of bounds, the popes and their advisors found an ideal form of protection whose purely discursive nature serves, at a par with gestures, to mask and authorize the real destruction of those same antiquities.

And thus on the Italian Quattrocento stage, in Rome, the three discourses of placement in historic perspective, placement in artistic perspective, and conservation contributed to the emergence of a new object: one reduced to classical antiquities only, by and for a public limited to a minority of *érudites*, artists, and princes. It constitutes no less for that the originary form of the historic monument.